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LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR. LITERATURE CURRICULUM III, STUDENT VERSION.

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A STUDENT VERSION OF A CURRICULUM GUIDE ON THE "LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR" WAS DEVELOPED. SELECTED LEGENDS ARE REPRODUCED ALONG WITH AN INTRODUCTION, STUDY QUESTIONS, AND A PASSAGE FROM MALORY'S "LE MORTE D'ARTHUR" IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION (1485). THE TEACHER VERSION IS ED 010 814. RELATED REPORTS ARE ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160 AND ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832. (GD)

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LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR.

Literature Curriculum III
Student Version.

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Student Version

LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR

INTRODUCTION

Many of you are probably familiar with Walt Disney's production of The Sword in the Stone and know some of the stories surrounding the court of King Arthur at Camelot. But who was the real King Arthur? The facts have become so lost in legend and fantasy that all we know for certain is that he was one of the last Romanized Britons to fight against the invading Saxons at the end of the fifth century. Under his leadership, the Saxons were driven back and England was united under a native ruler as once she had been under the Roman conquerors. In the earliest record of Arthur, written during the ninth century, he is spoken of as a soldier, more like a chieftain or general than a king, who lived a simple life and fought twelve victorious battles against the Saxons. But as the historical events grew dim in people's memories, stories of a great king clustered more and more around Arthur until he seemed to be an emperor equivalent to Charlemagne, surrounded by a company of noble knights who were sworn to defend the weak. You are going to read stories of King Arthur and his knights because they are part of our heritage. You may read them simply as stories of mystery and adventure, or as stories of the soul's struggle to find its way. Although the figures are medieval and the Fellowship of the Round Table is an idea that goes back at least to 1155, the themes of these stories are universal. Everyone has in his own mind a world far stranger than that outside him; it is this inner world of dreams that forms the subject matter of these stories.

Yet history and myth are so intermingled in the Arthurian legends that some of the supernatural happenings have a kind of historical foundation. For example, in the account of King Arthur's pulling of the sword from the stone, we may have a reference to the early age of metals when a hero proved himself by his power to forge his own weapon. Another example of historical fact in the midst of all the fantasy is that an adviser such as Merlin would be indispensable to early kings in their attempt to hold their place among warring rivals. Even the forest that is the scene of so many encounters may be considered the real forest that at one time covered much of England.

But if these tales were nothing but history, they probably would not have held the attention of so many people, both young and old, for so many centuries. More important than anything historical is the view that pervades these stories. We may describe this view as one which accepts the unseen powers that shape the individual's destiny. The ease with which Arthur pulls the sword from the stone reveals that it is his destiny to do the miraculous deed. Arthur is "chosen" to be king; later Sir Galahad is "chosen" to succeed in the quest for the Holy Grail. Yet we can see, too, that all the Arthurian heroes have their destinies determined by their own characters. Nothing outside Sir Launcelot forbids him from succeeding in his quest for the Grail, but only his own heart, which is more set on Guenever than on the service of God. For all the magic and strangeness of these stories, the people are spiritually as real as any you know. Perhaps in the long run, this is the kind of reality that literature has to offer us. It is not necessarily historical reality, but it is spiritual reality. So you are invited now to share some adventures that have more meaning than at first appears.

Note: The word "chivalry" is derived from the French "cheval", meaning a horse, but it came to stand for such ideals of knightly conduct as devotion to God and the knight's lady, as well as courage in the battles fought to redress wrongs or to defend the knight's honor. But only young men of noble families could become knights, for common people were not allowed to bear arms.

Study Questions for Part I

1. Why is it so important that Arthur should be able to perform the magic of pulling the sword from the stone?

2. Why did the nobles delay so long in recognizing and crowning Arthur?

3. The Arthurian legends are filled with magic and with heroic deeds, but they are also firmly rooted in reality. It is this combination that has made them so popular for so many hundreds of years. How does this combination work in the story of the establishment of Arthur's kingdom?

4. There is more than one sort of reality. What aspect of reality is dealt with in Section V?

5. What magical qualities were attached to the sword Excalibur and its scabbard? Why did Arthur as king need this protection?

6. If there is a deeper meaning conveyed through the story of Excalibur, how would you interpret it? What might the Lady of the Lake, and the forest itself, signify?

7. Part VI of this section ends with a curious incident in which Arthur tries to send all the children to sea. This sort of incident is very common in literature. The recurrence in literature of similar situations or of similar themes or of similar attitudes is called a motif. Can you think of anything you have read where this motif of an unsuccessful attempt to destroy a child appears? What do you think is the significance of this motif?

8. What is the significance of the Round Table and the "seat perilous"?

9. What seems to be the importance both of Arthur's wedding and of the founding of the Fellowship of the Round Table?

10. In the oath sworn by the Knights of the Round Table, do you see any contrast with the lawless world that they lived in?

11. You have now read a number of stories about King Arthur. Is each an episode that stands alone, or are they connected by anything more than having the same central character?

12. A writer often unconsciously puts into his work the prevailing point of view of his age. What details included in these stories point to the writer as living in feudal times? How can you explain this, knowing that the historic Arthur lived at the end of the fifth century?

Study Questions for Part II

1. Would this story be suitable for a movie? Give reasons for your answer.

2. This story follows the typical narrative pattern of beginning, middle, and end. What is included in the beginning? Where does it end? List the events that take place in the middle section. What pattern does the arrangement follow?

3. This story follows a formula that is as old as story-telling itself, and that is as popular and successful today as it was in Malory's time. What is that formula, and why do you think it is so popular?

4. Can you find any familiar motifs operating in this story?

5. Apart from pure entertainment, do you think there is any other purpose behind the story? How has this determined the form the story takes?

6. Why does Gareth endure the bad treatment he got from Linet, especially when he doesn't end up marrying her?

7. How well did Gareth know the lady whom he rescued? Why did he want to marry her? Why do you suppose she would not even see him for a year?

Study Questions for Part III

1. What is the significance of the Seat Perilous? Why did it remain empty?

2. Why did Galahad want to receive his knighthood from the hand of Sir Launcelot?

3. Who do you think the old man might be who brought Sir Galahad to the Round Table?

4. What was the Holy Grail? What might it symbolize?

5. With the coming of Galahad, the Round Table was completed. What happens next? Why can this episode be said to be rooted in reality?

6. Why did Galahad ask for death?

Study Questions for Part IV

1. What caused the dissolution of the Round Table? Could this have been avoided? Give reasons for your answer.

2. We have said that the Arthurian legends are rooted in reality. Review the causes of the decay of the Round Table. To what degree is human nature involved in the catastrophe? How realistic is this?

3. Why did Gawaine behave as he did? Why did Arthur allow himself to be guided by Gawaine?

4. What is the significance of the returning of the sword to the Lake?

5. Why doesn't Arthur die on the battlefield like everyone else?

6. With Arthur dead, why did Launcelot and Guenever not marry, and spend the rest of their lives together? Could this story have ended any other way than in tragedy? Give reasons for your answer.

Suggestions for Writing Assignments

1. Write a brief account of life in feudal times as you have pieced the picture together from your reading of the Arthurian Legends.

2. Describe in detail two knights in full armor engaged in combat. You may write this from the romantic viewpoint of a distant spectator, or from the realistic viewpoint of a participant. The tone may be either serious or humorous.

3. Discuss the supernatural elements that are woven into the stories of King Arthur. Compare them with other legends you are familiar with, and try to explain their significance.

4. Compare the story of Gareth and Linet with a popular television show. Point out the features that are common to both, and then note the important differences. If you can, try to say which seems to you the better story, and why.

5. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table were the heroes of feudal society. The stories of their exploits reveal a lot about the people who admired them. The behavior they found admirable was the kind of behavior they expected of themselves, although few were able to live up to the ideal. Gareth, for example accepted the scorn of Linet with noble restraint and courtesy. He respected the knightly qualities of men who opposed him, and persisted with courage in the face of danger and hardship until he had accomplished his purpose of freeing the imprisoned Dame Liones.

Who are the heroes of today? Write a few paragraphs about the exploits of one of them, and show how these deeds and these heroes reflect the values of our modern society, the things we consider important. Explain what kind of people we are in the light of the qualities we admire.

6. Several times during the telling of the stories of King Arthur, Malory has suggested that no matter what a man does, he is powerless to change his destiny. Find instances that illustrate this belief, and discuss the influence this idea had upon the lives of Arthur and his knights.

7. Write an account of the life of someone you admire. Be specific, and tell exactly what this person has done to earn your admiration. What does this reveal about yourself?

PART ONE

OF THE COMING OF ARTHUR AND THE BEGINNING OF HIS REIGN

I. Of the Birth of King Arthur, and of the Death of King Uther Pendragon.

It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, that there dwelt in his kingdom a lady both fair and wise, and her name was called Igraine. The king liked and loved this lady well, but despaired of winning her and at length for great love of fair Igraine the king Uther fell sick. Then came Sir Ulfius, a noble knight, to the king Uther and asked the king why he was sick.

"I shall tell thee," said the king, "I am sick for love of fair Igraine and I may not be healed."

"Well, my lord," said Sir Ulfius, "I shall seek the magician Merlin, and he shall do you remedy, so that your heart shall be pleased."

And when Ulfius had found the magician, he had no need to say why he had come, for Merlin knew all, and came straightway to King Uther and said,

"Sir, I know all your heart; if ye will be sworn unto me, as ye be a true king, to fulfil my desire, ye shall have your desire."

Then the king was sworn upon the four Evangelists.

"Sir," said Merlin, "this is my desire: that your first child, when it shall be born, shall be delivered to me to bring up as I choose; for this shall be to your honor and to the child's own great advantage."

All this was agreed upon, and shortly thereafter King Uther and the lady Igraine were married amid great mirth and joy.

It befell after a time that Queen Igraine was delivered of a son. Then came Merlin unto the king and reminded him of their bargain.

"Sir," he said, "I know a lord of yours in this land, that is a true and faithful man, a lord of large possessions in many parts of England and Wales, and his name is Sir Ector, and he shall have the care of your child."

So the child was delivered unchristened unto Merlin, and he bare it forth unto Sir Ector, and made a holy man to christen him, and named him Arthur; and Sir Ector's wife cherished him as her own child.

Then within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady, so that three days and three nights he was speechless: wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best.

"There is no remedy," said Merlin, "God will have his will. But look ye, all barons, come before King Uther tomorrow, and I shall make him to speak."

So on the morrow all the barons came with Merlin before the king; then Merlin said aloud unto King Uther,

"Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days, of this realm and all that belongs to it?"

Then Uther Pendragon turned himself, and said in hearing of them all,

"I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soul, and righteously and honorably claim the crown, else he will forfeit my blessing."

And therewith he yielded up the ghost, and was laid in a tomb as befitted a king. Wherefore the queen, fair Igraine, and all the barons made great sorrow.

II. How Arthur Was Chosen King Through the Wonders and Marvels of a Sword Taken Out of a Stone, and of How King Arthur Was Crowned.

After the death of Uther Pendragon the realm stood in great jeopardy, for Arthur was yet a child and many mighty lords struggled to claim the crown.

When some years had passed, Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should come to London by Christmas, and for this cause--that some miracle would show who should be rightful king of the realm. So all the lords and gentlemen of arms came unto London and many of them had said confession, that they might be the more acceptable unto God.

And on Christmas Day, in the greatest church of London, they were all gathered long before dawn to pray. And when the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone, four-square, like unto a marble stone, and in the midst thereof was an anvil of steel, a foot high, and therein stuck, by the point, a fair sword with naked blade, and letters there were, written in gold about the sword, that said thus:

> WHOSO PULLETH OUT THIS SWORD FROM THIS STONE AND ANVIL, IS RIGHTWISE KING BORN OF ALL ENGLAND.

And when they saw the writing some attempted to pull out the sword, those who desired to be king. But none might stir the sword, nor move it.

"He is not here," said the Archbishop, "that shall achieve this thing, but doubt not that God shall make him known. Therefore let us provide ten knights, men of good fame, to keep watch over this sword."

So it was ordained, and proclamation was made that every man that wished should essay to win the sword. And upon New Year's Day the barons arranged for a great tournament to be held, for the purpose of keeping the lords and the common people together, for the Archbishop trusted that God would make known him that should win the sword.

So upon New Year's Day, after mass was done, the barons rode into the field, some to joust and some to tourney. And so it happened that Sir Ector, that had large estates near London, rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay, his son, and young Arthur, that was his foster brother. And as they rode, Sir Kay found that he had no sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging, and he prayed young Arthur to ride for his sword.

"I will," said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword, but when he came home he found no one there to give him the sword, for all were out to see the jousting. Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself,

"I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day."

When he came to the churchyard, Arthur alit and tied his horse to the stile. Then he looked about him, but he found there no knights, who should have been guarding the sword, for they were at the jousting. So he grasped the sword by the hilt and quickly and strongly pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode until he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword.

As soon as Sir Kay saw the sword he knew well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father Sir Ector.

"Sir," he said, "lo, here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land."

When Sir Ector beheld the sword he turned back, and came to the church and they went inside all three. And there he made Sir Kay to swear upon a book how he came by that sword.

"Sir," then said Sir Kay, "by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me."

"How got ye this sword?" said Sir Ector to Arthur.

And Arthur told him how it had happened.

"Now," said Sir Ector, "I understand ye must be king of this land."

"Wherefore I?" said Arthur, "and for what cause?"

"Sir," said Sir Ector, "God will have it so, for never a man should draw out this sword, but he that shall be rightways king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again."

"That is no deed of prowess," said Arthur, and so he put it back in the stone. Then Sir Ector essayed to pull out the sword and failed.

"Now essay," said Sir Ector unto Sir Kay. And Sir Kay pulled at the sword with all his might, but it would not move.

"Now shall ye essay," said Sir Ector to Arthur.

"I will," said Arthur, and pulled it out easily. And therewith Sir Ector knelt down to the earth, and Sir Kay as well.

"Alas," said Arthur, "my own dear father and brother, why kneel ye to me?"

"Nay, nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so. I was never your father, nor of your blood, but I know well ye are of a higher blood than I thought ye were."

And then Sir Ector told Arthur how he had been entrusted to him by Merlin. Then Arthur made great sorrow when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father.

"Sir," said Sir Ector unto Arthur, "will ye be my good and gracious lord when ye are king?"

"If not, then were I much to blame," said Arthur, "for ye are the man in the world that I am most beholden to. And if ever it be God's will that I be king, as ye say, ye shall ask of me what ye will, and I shall not fail you; God forbid I should fail you."

"Sir," said Sir Ector, "I will ask no more of you than that ye will make my son, your foster brother Sir Kay, seneschal of all your lands."

"That shall be done," said Arthur, "and by my faith, never a man shall have that office but he, while he and I live."

Therewith they went unto the Archbishop, and told him how the sword was achieved, and by whom.

On Twelfth Day all the barons came thither, that all who so wished might essay to win the sword. But there before them all, there might none take it out but Arthur. Wherefore there were many lords wroth, and they said it was a great shame unto them and all the realm to be governed by a boy born of no high blood, for there were none yet that knew he was the son of Uther Pendragon. And so they all agreed that the decision be put off till Candlemas, and then all the barons should meet there again.

So at Candlemas many more great lords came thither for to have won the sword, but there might none prevail. And just as Arthur had done at Christmas, so did he again at Candlemas, and pulled out the sword easily. At this the barons were much aggrieved, and put off the decision till the high feast of Easter. And just as Arthur had done before, so did he at Easter, but yet some of the great lords were indignant that Arthur should be king, and put the decision off till the feast of Pentecost.

Then the Archbishop of Canterbury, by Merlin's advice, summoned the best knights that they might get, such knights as Uther Pendragon loved best and trusted most in his own day, and these knights were put about Arthur. Sir Baudwin of Britain, Sir Kay, Sir Ulfius, Sir Brastias--all these, with many others, were always about Arthur, day and night, till the feast of Pentecost.

And at the feast of Pentecost all manner of men essayed to pull out the sword, but none might prevail but Arthur, and he pulled it out before all the lords and commoners that were there. Wherefore all the commoners cried at once,

"We will have Arthur for our king! We will delay no more, for we see that it is God's will that he shall be our king, and who that holdeth against it, we will slay him."

And therewith they all kneeled at once, both rich and poor, and begged mercy of Arthur because they had delayed him so long. And Arthur forgave them, and took the sword between both his hands, and offered it upon the altar where the Archbishop was, and so he was made knight by the best man that was there.

And so at once was the coronation held. And there was he sworn unto his lords and to the common people to be a true king, to govern with true justice from thenceforth, all the days of his life.

III. Of the First War That King Arthur Had, and How He Won the Field.

After he was crowned, many complaints were made unto King Arthur of great wrongs that were done since the death of King Uther, of many lords, knights, ladies, and gentlemen who had been unjustly bereaved of their lands. Wherefore King Arthur made the lands to be given again unto them that owned them.

When this was done, and the king had settled all the lands about London, then did he make Sir Kay seneschal of England; and Sir Baudwin of Britain was made constable; and Sir Ulfius was made chamberlain; and Sir Brastias was made warden of the country north of the River Trent, for here dwelt many of the king's enemies.

Then the king removed into Wales, and proclaimed a great feast to be held at Pentecost after the coronation, at the city of Carlion, and unto the feast came six mighty kings, among them King Lot of Orkney and King Uriens of Gore, and with them their knights. And King Arthur was glad of their coming, for he thought that they had come to do him honor, wherefore the king made great joy, and sent the kings and knights great presents. But the kings would none receive, and said they had no wish to receive gifts of a beardless boy that was born of low blood. And they sent him word that they were come to give him gifts with hard swords betwixt the neck and the shoulders, for it was great shame to all them to see such a boy have the rule of so noble a realm as this land was.

Then all the kings laid siege to the strong tower, whence Arthur had gone with five hundred good men. Soon there came Merlin,, among the kings, and then all asked him,

"For what cause is that boy Arthur made king?'

"Sirs," said Merlin, "I shall tell you the cause: for that he is King Uther Pendragon's son. He shall be king and overcome all his enemies; and, before he dies, he shall long be king of all England, and have under his power Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and more realms than I will now name."

Some of the kings marvelled at Merlin's words, and deemed it well that it should be as he said; but some of them, as King Lot, laughed him to scorn; and others called him a witch. But they agreed that Arthur might come out safely and speak with them. So Merlin went unto King Arthur, and said,

"Fear not, but come out boldly and speak with them, and spare them not, but answer them as their king and chieftain, for ye shall overcome them all, whether they will or not."

Then Arthur came out of his tower, and under his gown he had armor of double mail, and there went with him the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Sir Baudwin of Britain, and Sir Kay, and Sir Brastias. And when they were met, there was no meekness, but stout words on both sides; but always King Arthur answered them boldly, and said he would make them to bow if he lived. Wherefore they departed with wrath, and both sides prepared them for battle.

"What will ye do?" said Merlin to the kings. "Ye were better to refrain, for ye shall not here prevail, though ye were ten times so many."

"Be we well-advised to fear a dream-reader?" said King Lot. With that Merlin vanished away, and came to King Arthur.

"Sir," said Merlin, "fight not with the sword that ye got by miracle, till ye see the worst approach, then draw it out and do your best."

And Sir Baudwin, Sir Kay, Sir Brastias, and all Arthur's knights slew on the right hand and on the left hand, so that it was a marvel; and always King Arthur on horseback laid on with a sword, that many of the kings marvelled at his deeds and hardiness, until at length his horse was slain underneath him. And therewith King Lot smote down King Arthur. But his knights rescued him and set him again on horseback. Then he drew his sword, and it was so bright in his enemies' eyes, that it gave light like thirty torches. And therewith he drove them back, and slew many people. And then the common folk of Carlion arose with clubs and stones and slew many knights; but the kings remained together, with their knights that were left alive, and so fled and departed. And Merlin came unto Arthur and counselled him to follow them no further. And that was the first war which Arthur fought.

IV. How Eleven Kings and Their Host Fought Against King Arthur and His Host, and How the Battle Was Ended by Merlin.

Then King Arthur came unto London, and after some time had passed he called his barons to a council, for Merlin had told him that the six kings that had made war upon him had gathered to them five kings more, and would in all haste be revenged upon him. Wherefore the king asked counsel of his barons. They could no counsel give, but said they gladly would do battle for his sake.

"I thank you for your good courage," said Arthur, "but will ye all that loveth me speak with Merlin? Ye know well that he hath done much for me, and he knoweth many things."

So Merlin was sent for, and was desired by all the barons to give them best counsel.

"I shall tell you," said Merlin, "my advice; unless our king have more horsemen with him than he may get within the bounds of his own realm, he shall be overcome in battle, and slain. But beyond the sea there are two brethren, kings both, and marvellous good men; and the one is called King Ban of Benwick and the other King Bors of Gaul, that is, France. And on these two kings warreth a mighty man of men, the King Claudas; wherefore this is my counsel: that our king and sovereign lord send letters unto these kings that if they will come and help King Arthur in his wars, he will be sworn unto them to help them in their wars against King Claudas."

"This is well counselled," said the king and all the barons.

Right so in all haste it was ordained; Ulfius and Brastias were made the messengers, and so rode forth unto the city of Benwick. And when that they had come unto Benwick it happened that both King Ban and King Bors were there. And when it was told the kings that there were come two messengers with letters from Arthur, King of England, they said they were most welcome. And when Ban and Bors understood the letters, they said that they were still more welcome than they had been before, and said they would come unto Arthur in all haste. Then Ulfius and Brastias had good cheer and rode forth till they came unto their lord and told him how they had fared, whereof King Arthur was exceeding glad.

By All Hallowmass the two kings were come over the sea, and with them their knights, well arrayed. Then Merlin took the most part of the host and led them northward unto the forest of Bedegraine, and there in a valley he lodged them secretly. Then rode he unto Arthur and the two kings, and told them that he had lodged ten thousand men on horseback in the forest of Bedegraine, well armed at all points.

Now did the eleven kings of the northern host begin to gather their people; and this was their reason: to have revenge for the defeat that the six kings had suffered at Carlion; and they swore that, come weal or woe, they would not leave one another till they had destroyed Arthur. They were soon ready, and mounted upon horse and departed and drew toward Arthur.

By Merlin's advice there were sent forth, from Arthur's host, riders to skim the country and learn which way the eleven kings would ride and lodge that night, and when they knew this, they set upon them at midnight, as they were in their pavilions. But the scout set to watch by the northern host cried,

"Lords! To arms! Here be your enemies at your hand!"

Then King Arthur and King Ban and King Bors, with their good and trusty knights, set on them fiercely, but the eleven kings fought back with manly prowess of arms, so that there were slain that night ten thousand good men's bodies.

Then it drew toward daylight, and when King Lot had espied King Bors, he knew him well, and said unto a knight,

"O Jesu, defend us from death and horrible wounds! I see well we be in great peril of death, for I see yonder a king, one of the most worshipful men and one of the best knights of the world."

"What is he?" said the knight.

"It is," said King Lot, "King Bors of Gaul; I marvel how they came into this country without our knowledge."

"It was by Merlin's advice," said the knight.

And all the day there was a great breaking of spears, and smiting of swords with slaying of men and horses.

Then came onto the field King Ban, as fierce as a lion, and his armor was adorned with bands of green and thereupon gold.

"Ha!" said King Lot, "now shall we be defeated, for yonder I see the most valiant knight of the world, and the most reknowned. Such two brethren as are King Ban and King Bors are not living, wherefore we must needs flee or die."

When King Ban came into the battle, he came in so fiercely that his strokes echoed from the wood and the water; wherefore King Lot wept for pity and grief, that he saw so many of his good knights take their end.

Then came a knight and smote King Ban high upon the helm, a great stroke. Then King Ban was wroth and followed him fiercely; the other raised his shield, and spurred his horse forward, but the stroke of King Ban fell down and cut through the shield and the steel trappings of the horse, and cut the horse in two pieces, so that the sword struck the earth. Then the knight leaped quickly off his horse, and with his sword he stabbed the horse of King Ban through and through. With that King Ban leaped quickly from his dead horse, and then he smote the other so eagerly on the helm that he fell to the earth.

Then came into this part of the field King Arthur, and found King Ban standing among dead men and dead horses, fighting on foot like a mad lion, and any that came near him, within reach of his sword, caught a grievous buffet. And King Arthur was so bloody that by his shield there might no man know him, for all was blood and brains on his sword. And as Arthur looked about him he saw a knight that was well horsed, and therewith King Arthur ran to him, and smote him on the helm, so that his sword went unto his teeth, and the knight sank down to the earth dead, and at once Arthur took the horse by the rein and led him unto King Ban, and said,

"Fair brother, have this horse, for ye have great need thereof; it grieveth me sore to see your great wounds."

"I shall soon be revenged," said King Ban.

And when he was again mounted on horseback, there began a new battle, which was sore and hard, and there was much slaughter. But the eleven kings and their knights could not be overcome, and King Arthur marvelled at their deeds, and was exceeding wroth.

"Ah, Sir Arthur," said King Ban and King Bors, "blame them not, for they do as good men ought to do. By my faith, they are the best fighting men and knights of prowess that ever I saw, and those eleven kings are men of great honor."

"I may not love them," said Arthur, "they would destroy me."

Therewith began the battle yet again, and the eleven kings and their knights did marvellous deeds of arms, and Arthur, Ban, Bors, and their knights slew on both hands, so that their horses went in blood up to the fetlocks.

With that came Merlin on a great black horse, and said unto Arthur,

"Hast thou not done enough? Of three-score thousand thou hast left but fifteen thousand alive this day, and it is time to say Ho! for God is wroth with thee. Ye need not fear these eleven kings now, for they have more on hand than they are aware of: the Saracens are landed in their countries, and burn and slay and make great destruction, and these kings will have much ado to defend their lands. Therefore withdraw you, and reward your good knights with gold and silver, for they have well deserved it."

"So shall it be done," said Arthur. And so came to an end the second great war that King Arthur fought.

V. How King Arthur Rescued King Leodegrance, and How He Met With His Mother, Queen Igraine.

After that there came word that the King of North Wales had attacked King Leodegrance of Cameliard, and Arthur was wroth, for he loved King

Leodegrance well. So he rode into the country of Cameliard, and there rescued King Leodegrance; and there too had Arthur the first sight of Guenever, the king's daughter, who was afterward his queen.

Then Arthur rode to Carlion and thither came King Lot's wife of Orkney, with her four sons, Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth, to see the court of King Arthur. She was a fair lady, and therefore the king felt great love for her. And it came to pass that in time she gave him a son, and his name was Mordred. But King Arthur knew not that this queen was his half-sister, on his mother's side. For when the lady Igraine married Uther Pendragon, she was then the widow of the duke of Tintagil; and by the duke she had had three daughters, and one had King Lot wedded. But Arthur knew not that Igraine was his mother.

Then the king dreamed a marvellous dream, whereof he was sore afraid. He thought there was come into his land monsters and serpents, that burnt and slew all the people in the land; and then he fought with them, and they wounded him full sore, but at the last he slew them. When the king awaked, he was saddened by his dream.

And as the king one day sat pondering, there came to him Merlin in the likeness of a boy of fourteen years, and said unto him,

"I know what thou art, also who were thy father and thy mother: King Uther Pendragon was thy father and Queen Igraine thy mother."

"That is false," said King Arthur; "thou art not so old of years to know my father. I will not believe thee." And he was wroth with the child.

So Merlin departed and came again in the likeness of an old man of fourscore years of age, and he seemed to be wise, whereof the king was right glad and told how a child had come and said many things it seemed he should not have known, being of such an age.

"Yes," said the old man, "the child told you truth, and would have told you more if ye had listened, for ye have done a thing of late that hath made God displeased with you: ye have loved your sister and she hath borne you a child that shall destroy you and all the knights of your realm in a great battle."

"What are ye," said Arthur, "that tell me these tidings?"

"I am Merlin, and I was he in the child's likeness."

"Ah," said King Arthur, "ye are a marvellous man, but I marvel more at thy words that I must die in battle."

"Marvel not," said Merlin, "for it is God's will that your body be punished for your foul deeds. But I too may well be sorry," said Merlin, "for I shall die a shameful death--to be put into the earth alive; but ye shall die a glorious death."

Soon afterward the king asked Sir Ector and Sir Ulfius who were his father and his mother, and they told him Uther Pendragon and Queen Igraine. Then said the king,

"I would that my mother be sent for, that I may speak with her; and if she say so herself, then will I believe it."

In all haste Igraine was sent for, and she came, and the king welcomed her in the best manner. Then came Sir Ulfius, and said openly unto Igraine, that all might hear,

"Ye are the falsest lady of the world, and the most traitorous to the king's person."

"Beware," said Arthur, "what thou sayest."

"I am well aware," said Ulfius, "what I speak; this Queen Igraine is causer of your great war, for if she had admitted of the birth of you, ye had never had the deadly wars that ye have had; for the most part of your realm never knew whose son ye were."

Then spake Igraine and said,

"It happened that when my child was born he was delivered unto Merlin, by commandment of my husband King Uther; and so I saw the child never after, nor knew what was his name."

So Ulfius said to the queen,

"Then Merlin is more to blame than ye."

Then Merlin took the king by the hand, saying,

"This is your mother."

And Sir Ector bore witness how he had brought Arthur up by Uther's commandment. And therewith King Arthur took his mother, Queen Igraine, in his arms and kissed her. And then he proclaimed a feast that lasted eight days.

VI. How Merlin Saved Arthur's Life, and Threw an Enchantment on King Pellinore: and How Arthur by the Means of Merlin Got Excalibur His Sword from the Lady of the Lake.

It befell, not long after this feast, that King Arthur, well armed at all points, was riding through the country, when he was aware of three churls chasing Merlin, that would have slain him. Then the king rode unto them and bade them,

"Flee, churls!"

Then were they afeared when they saw a knight, and fled.

"O Merlin," said Arthur, "thou hadst been slain, despite all thy crafts, had I not been here."

"Nay," said Merlin, "not so, for I could save myself had I wished; and thou art more near death than I am."

So as they went thus talking, they came to a fountain, and a rich pavilion there by it. Then Arthur was aware of a knight that sat beside it, armed, in a chair.

"Sir knight," said Arthur, "for what cause dost thou wait here, so that no knight may ride this way unless he joust with thee? I counsel thee to leave that custom."

"This custom," said the knight, "have I had and will keep, no matter who saith nay, and whoever is grieved by my custom, let him change it if he will."

"I will change it." said Arthur.

"I shall oppose thee," said the knight.

At once he took his horse and raised his shield and took a spear, and they ran together so hard that each broke his spear on the other's shield. Then there came a squire and brought two more spears and Arthur chose one and the knight another. So they spurred their horses and came together with all their might, and again both broke their spears. Two more great spears were brought out, and therewith they ran together. Arthur's spear was shivered to pieces, but the other knight hit Arthur so hard that horse and man fell to the earth. Then the knight alit, and both drew their swords.

And there began a strong battle, with many great strokes, and they so hewed with their swords that much blood they bled both, and all the place where they fought was covered with blood. So at the last they smote so that both their swords met even together. But the sword of the knight smote the sword of King Arthur in two pieces. Then said the knight unto Arthur,

"Thou art in my power to save or slay as I like, and unless thou yield thee as overcome, thou shalt die."

"As for death," said King Arthur, "welcome be it when it cometh, but I had liefer die than be so shamed as yield me unto thee."

And therewithal the king leaped at the knight, and took him by the middle and threw him down, and pulled off his helm. But the knight was an exceeding big man of might, and at once he brought Arthur under him, and pulled off his helm and would have smitten off his head, but that Merlin approached, saying,

"Knight, hold thy hand, for if thou slay that knight thou puttest this realm in the utmost danger; for this knight is a man of more glory than thou know."

"Why, who is he?" said the knight.

"It is King Arthur."

Then would the knight have slain the king for fear of Arthur's wrath, and heaved up his sword, but Merlin cast an enchantment upon him, that he fell to the earth in a great sleep. Then Merlin took up King Arthur and they rode forth.

"Alas!" said Arthur, "what hast thou done, Merlin? Hast thou slain this good knight by thy crafts? There liveth not so good a knight as he was."

"Care ye not," said Merlin, "for he is but asleep, and will wake in three hours. His name is Pellinore, and he shall hereafter do you right good service; and he shall have two sons that shall be exceeding good men, and their names shall be Percivale of Wales and Lamerake of Wales; and he shall tell you the name of your own son, born of your sister, that shall be the destruction of all this realm."

As they rode further, Arthur said,

"I have no sword."

"No matter," said Merlin; "near here is a sword that shall be yours."

So they rode till they came to a lake, a water both fair and broad, and in the midst of the lake Arthur saw an arm clothed in white samite, that held in its hand a fair sword.

"Lo!" said Merlin, "yonder is that sword that I spake of."

With that they saw a damsel coming across the lake.

"What damsel is that?" said Arthur.

"That is the Lady of the Lake," said Merlin, "and she will come to you; speak ye fair to her, so that she will give you that sword."

And at once the damsel came unto Arthur, and they saluted one another.

"Damsel," said Arthur, "what sword is that, that yonder the arm holdeth above the water:? I would it were mine, for I have no sword."

"Sir Arthur," said the damsel: "that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it of you, ye shall have it."

"By my faith," said Arthur, "I will give you whatever gift ye will ask.'

"Well!" said the damsel, "go ye into yonder barge, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you; and I will ask my gift when I see my time."

So King Arthur and Merlin alit and tied their horses to two trees, and went into the barge; and when they came to the sword that the hand held, King Arthur took it up by the hilt, and took it with him, and the arm went under the water. And so they came unto the land, and as they rode forth, King Arthur looked upon the sword, and liked it exceeding well.

"Which like you better," said Merlin, "the sword or the scabbard?"

"I like better the sword," said Arthur.

"Ye are most unwise," said Merlin, "for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword; for while ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall lose no blood, no matter how sore ye be wounded; therefore keep the scabbard always with you."

So they rode unto Carlion, where Arthur's knights were right glad. And when they heard of his adventures, they marvelled that he would endanger his person so, alone. But they said it was merry to be under such a chieftain, that would risk his person in adventure as other poor knights did.

After a short time it befell that King Arthur sent for all the children born on May Day, for Merlin had told him that the one that should destroy him would be born on May Day; wherefore he sent for them all, upon pain of death, and all were sent unto the king, and so was Mordred sent by King Lot's wife; and all were put in a ship and sent to sea, and some were four weeks old, and some were less. But it happened that the ship drove unto a rock and was wrecked and most of the children were destroyed, save that Mordred was cast up; a good man found him and cared for him till he was fourteen years old, and then he was brought to the court of King Arthur to become a knight.

VII. How King Arthur Wedded Guenever, and How the Knights of the Round Table Were Ordained.

In the beginning, after Arthur was chosen King by fortune and by grace, the most part of his barons knew not that he was Uther Pendragon's son; and though Merlin made it openly known, yet many kings and lords held great war against him, believing him to be of low birth. But Arthur overcame them all, for he was ruled by the counsel of Merlin, as he was most of the days of his life. So it befell, on a time, that King Arthur said unto Merlin,

"My barons will let me have no rest, till that I take a wife; and I will take none except by thine advice."

"It is well," said Merlin, "that ye take a wife, for a man of your bounty and nobility should not be without one. Now is there any that ye love more than another?"

"Yea," said King Arthur, "I love Guenever, daughter of King Leodegrance of Cameliard, that hath in his house the Table Round that ye told me he got from my father Uther. And this damsel is the fairest lady that I know or ever could find."

"Sir," said Merlin, "as to her beauty, she is one of the fairest alive; but, if ye loved her not so well as ye do, if your heart were not set, I should find you another damsel of beauty and of goodness that should please you well." And Merlin told the king that he were unwise to take Guenever to wife, for he warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him. "But," he said, "when a man's heart is set, he will be loath to change."

"That is truth," said King Arthur.

So Merlin went forth unto King Leodegrance, and told him of the desire of the king.

"That," said King Leodegrance, "is the best tidings that ever I heard--that so worthy a king of prowess and nobility will wed my daughter. And as a gift, I shall give him what shall please him greatly, for I shall give him the Table Round, which Uther Pendragon gave me, and when it is full, there are one hundred and fifty knights. And I have one hundred good knights myself, but I lack fifty, for so many have been slain in my days."

And so King Leodegrance delivered his daughter Guenever unto Merlin, and the Table Round with the hundred knights, and so they rode till they came unto London.

When King Arthur heard of the coming of Guenever and the hundred knights with the Table Round, then King Arthur made great joy for her coming, and that rich present, and said openly,

"This fair lady is exceeding welcome unto me, for I have loved her long, and therefore there is nothing so dear to me. And these knights with the Round Table please me more than great riches."

And in all haste the king gave orders for the marriage and the coronation to take place in the most honorable wise that could be devised.

"Now, Merlin," said King Arthur, "go thou and seek me fifty knights which be of the most prowess and honor, to fill the seats of the Round Table which be empty."

Within short time Merlin had found eight-and-twenty such knights, but no more could he find. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury was fetched, and he blessed the seats with great royalty and devotion, and placed the eight-and-twenty knights in their seats.

Then said Merlin,

"There shall no man sit in these two seats but them that shall be of the most honor. As for this, the Seat Perilous, there shall no man sit therein but one, and if there be any so bold as to try, they shall be destroyed; he that shall sit there shall have no equal."

Then he said unto the knights that were seated,

"Fair sirs, you must all arise and come to King Arthur to do him homage."

And so they arose and did their homage, and when they were gone Merlin found in every seat letters of gold that told the knights' names that had sat therein.

Soon after there came young Gawaine and asked the king a gift.

"Ask," said the king, "and I shall grant it you."

"Sir, I ask that ye will make me knight that same day ye shall wed fair Guenever."

"I will do it with a good will," said King Arthur, "for ye are my nephew, my sister's son."

Then was the high feast made ready, and the king was wedded at Camelot unto the lady Guenever in the church of Saint Stephen's, with great solemnity.

Then the king established all his knights, and unto them that were not rich he gave lands, and charged them never to do outrage nor murder, and always to flee treason; also, by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their honor and the lordship of King Arthur for evermore; and always to give help unto ladies, damsels, and gentlewomen, upon pain of death. Also, that no man do battle in a wrongful quarrel, neither for law nor for worldly goods. Unto this were all the knights of the Table Round sworn, both young and old. And every year were they sworn again at the high feast of Pentecost.

PART TWO

HERE FOLLOWETH THE TALE OF SIR GARETH OF ORKNEY THAT WAS CALLED BEAUMAINS

I. How Beaumains came to King Arthur's court, and how he undertook the adventure of the damsel.

When King Arthur held his Round Table most fully, he had a custom at the feast of Pentecost that he would not go that day to meat until he had heard or seen a great marvel. And through that custom all manner of strange adventures came before Arthur at that feast above all other feasts.

And it happened on a time that Sir Gawaine, a little before noon on the day of Pentecost, espied at a window three men upon horseback, and a dwarf on foot. And the three men alit and the dwarf kept their horses, and one of the three men was higher than the other two by a foot and a half. Then Sir Gawaine went unto the king and said,

"Sir, go to your meat, for here at hand come strange adventures."

So Arthur went unto his meat with many others; and all the knights of the Round Table were there, save those that were prisoners or had been slain in battle. Then came into the hall two men well and richly dressed, and upon their shouders there leaned the goodliest and the fairest young man that ever they all saw, and he was large and long and broad in the shoulders, and goodly of face, and he was the fairest and largest handed that ever man saw, but he seemed as if he might not stand unless he leaned upon their shoulders.

As soon as Arthur saw him, room was made, and the two men went with him right unto King Arthur without saying any words. Then this young man pulled himself back, and easily stretched up straight, saying,

"King Arthur, God bless you and all your fair fellowship, and in especial the fellowship of the Table Round. I am come hither for this cause: to pray you to give me three gifts, and they shall not be unreasonable, but ye may honorably grant them and at no great loss. And the first gift I will ask now, and the other two gifts I will ask one year from this day, wheresoever ye hold your high feast."

"Now ask," said Arthur, "and ye shall have your asking."

"Sir, this is my petition, that ye will give me meat and drink sufficiently for this twelvemonth, and at that day I will ask my other two gifts."

"My fair son," said Arthur, "ask better, I counsel thee, for this is but a simple asking; for greatly my judgment faileth me if thou art not come of men of worship, and shalt prove to be a man of right great worship."

"Sir," said he, "I have asked what I will ask."

"So be it," said the king. "But what is thy name?"

"I cannot tell you," said he.

"That is marvel," said the king, "that thou knowest not thy name; but thou are the goodliest young man that ever I saw."

Then the king took him to Sir Kay, the steward, and charged him that he should give him all manner of meats and drinks of the best, and that he should treat him as though he were a lord's son.

"There is little need," said Sir Kay, "to spend much upon him; for I daresay he is low born, for if he had come of gentlemen he would have asked of you horse and armor, but such as he is, so he asketh. And since he hath no name, I shall give him one, and that shall be Beaumains, that is, Fair-hands, and into the kitchen I shall bring him."

And so the two men departed and left the young man to Sir Kay, that scorned and mocked him. Thereat was Sir Gawaine wroth, and Sir Launcelot also, and they bade Sir Kay leave his mocking.

"As he is, so hath he asked," said Sir Kay again, and he bade Beaumains get him a place and sit down to meat, so Beaumains sat him down among the boys and lads, and there he ate sadly. Then Sir Launcelot bade him come to his chamber, and there he should have meat and drink enough, and so did Sir Gawaine, but he refused them all; he would do only as Sir Kay commanded him.

So thus he was put into the kitchen, and lay nightly where the boys of the kitchen did. And so he endured all that year, and never displeased man nor child, but always he was meek and mild. But ever when there was any jousting of knights, that would he see, if he might. And ever Sir Launcelot would give him gold to spend, and so would Sir Gawaine. And where there were contests of skill, thereat would he be, and there might none cast a stone as far as he. Then would Sir Kay say,

"How liketh you my boy of the kitchen?"

So time passed on till the feast of Pentecost, and that year the king held it at Carlion in the most royal manner that might be; and again he would no meat eat until he heard some adventures. Then came there a squire to the king and said,

"Sir, ye may go to your meat, for here cometh a damsel with some strange adventures."

Then King Arthur sat him down, and just then there came a damsel into the hall, and saluted the king, asking for help.

"For whom?" said the king. "What is the adventure?"

"Sir," she said, "I have a lady of great worship and renown, and she is besieged by a tyrant so that she may not come out of her castle. And because here are the noblest knights of the world, I come to you for help."

"What is your lady called? And what is his name that hath besieged her?"

"Sir," she said, "ye shall not know my lady's name at this time; but she is a lady of great worship and great lands. As for the tyrant, he is called the Red Knight of the Red Lawns."

"I know him not," said the king.

"Sir," said Sir Gawaine, "I know him well, for he is one of the most perilous knights of the world; men say he has seven men's strength, and from him I once barely escaped with my life."

"Fair damsel," said the king, "there be knights here who would do their power for to rescue your lady, but because you will not tell her name, nor where she dwelleth, therefore none of my knights that be here now shall go with you by my will."

"Then must I speak further," said the damsel.

With these words there came Beaumains before the king, and thus he said:

"Sir king, God thank you, I have been this twelvemonth in your kitchen and have had my full sustenance, and now I will ask my other two gifts."

"Ask," said the king.

"First, that ye will grant me to have this adventure of the damsel, for it belongeth unto me."

"Thou shalt have it," said the king, "I grant it thee."

"Then, sir, this is the other gift, that ye shall bid Launcelot of the Lake make me knight, for by him will I be made knight and by no one else. And when I am gone, I pray you let him ride after me and make me knight when I require him."

"All this shall be done," said the king.

"Fie on thee," said the damsel, "shall I have none but your kitchen page?"

Then was she wroth, and took her horse and departed. And when Beaumains was armed, he took his leave of King Arthur and Sir Gawaine, and of Sir Launcelot, and prayed that he would ride after him; and so he departed and rode after the damsel. And there went many after him to behold how well he was clad in cloth of gold, but he had neither shield nor spear. Then Sir Kay said openly in the hall,

"I will ride after my boy of the kitchen, to see whether he will know me for his better."

And though Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine bade him abide at home, Sir Kay made him ready and took his horse and his spear and rode after Beaumains. As soon as Beaumains overtook the damsel, up came Sir Kay, and said,

"What, sir! Know ye not me?"

Then Beaumains turned his horse and knew it was Sir Kay, that had done him great scorn.

"Yea," said Beaumains, "I know you for an ungentle knight, and therefore beware of me."

Therewith Sir Kay ran straight upon him with his spear, and Beaumains ran as fast upon Sir Kay with his sword in his hand; and so he knocked away the spear with his sword, and thrust Sir Kay through the side, so that he fell down as if he were dead. Then Beaumains took Sir Kay's shield and his spear, and rode his way.

II. How Beaumains was dubbed knight.

By that time Sir Launcelot was come, and Beaumains offered to joust with him; and they made ready, and came together so fiercely that either bore the other to the earth, and sore were they bruised. Then Sir Launcelot arose and helped Beaumains up. And then Beaumains offered to fight with Sir Launcelot on foot, and so they rushed together like boars, dodging and striking for an hour, and Sir Launcelot marvelled at Beaumains' strength, for he fought more like a giant than a knight, and his fighting was steady and exceeding perilous. Then Sir Launcelot said,

"Beaumains, fight not so sore, your quarrel and mine is not so great that we may not leave off."

"That is truth," said Beaumains, "but it doth me good to feel your might; and yet, my lord, I showed not the utmost of my strength."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "I promise you that I had as much to do as I might to save myself from disgrace, and therefore have ye no fear of any earthly knight."

"Hope ye that I may ever stand a proved knight?" said Beaumains.

"Yea," said Launcelot, "if ye do as ye have done."

"Then I pray you," said Beaumains, "give me the order of knighthood."

"Then must ye tell me your name," said Launcelot.

"Sir, if ye will not expose me, I shall," said Beaumains.

"That I promise you by the faith of my body," said Sir Launcelot.

"Then, Sir," he said, "my name is Gareth, brother unto Sir Gawaine."

"Ah! Sir," said Launcelot, "I am gladder than I was, for ever I thought ye came of great blood."

And then Sir Launcelot gave him the order of knighthood, and then he departed from him and came to Sir Kay, and made him to be borne home upon his shield, and all men scorned Sir Kay.

When Beaumains had overtaken the damsel, at once she said,

"What dost thou here? Thou stinkest of the kitchen, thy clothes be foul with the grease and tallow of King Arthur's kitchen. Thinkest thou," she said, "that I shall accept thee because thou hast slain yonder knight? Nay truly, for thou slewest him by mischance and cowardly; therefore depart, foul kitchen page, I know thee well. What art thou but a turner of roasting spits and a ladle-washer?"

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "say to me what ye will, I will not depart from you, for I have undertaken to King Arthur to achieve your adventure, and so shall I finish it, or I shall die."

"Fie on thee, kitchen knave, thou shalt soon meet one that thou wouldst not look in the face for all the broth that ever thou suppest."

"I shall assay," said Beaumains.

So thus as they rode in the wood, there came toward them a man flying as fast as he might.

"O lord," he said, "help me, for near here are six thieves that have taken my lord and bound him and I fear lest they will slay him."

"Bring me thither," said Beaumains.

And so they rode till they came to the knight and the six thieves, and then Beaumains rode unto them and struck one unto the death, and then another, and at the third stroke he slew the third thief: and then the other three fled. But he rode after them, and he overtook them, and at the last he slew them, and returned and unbound the knight. And the knight thanked him and prayed him to ride with him to his castle where he should reward him.

"Sir," said Beaumains, "I will no reward have, for I was this day made knight by noble Sir Launcelot. And also I must follow this damsel."

But when he came nigh her, she bade him ride from her.

"For thou smellest all of the kitchen. Thinkest thou that I am pleased with thee? This deed that thou hast done is but mischance. But thou shalt soon see a sight that shall make thee turn again, and that quickly."

Then the knight which was rescued from the thieves rode after the damsel, and prayed her to lodge at his castle that night. And because it was near night she rode with him to his castle, and there they had great cheer. And at dinner the knight set Beaumains beside the damsel.

"Fie, fie, sir knight," she said, "ye are uncourteous to set a kitchen page beside me. He is better fit to stick a swine than to sit by a lady of high birth."

Then the knight was ashamed at her words, and took Beaumains to a side table and sat down himself beside him. And on the morn the damsel and he thanked the knight and took their leave, and so rode on their way until they came to a great river with but one passage, and there were two knights there to block their way.

"What sayest thou," said the damsel, "wilt thou match yonder knights, or turn again?"

"Nay," said Beaumains, "I would not turn again if there were six more."

And therewith he rushed into the water, and he and one of the knights broke their spears on each other, and then they drew their swords and smote eagerly at each other. And at the last Sir Beaumains smote the other upon the helm that he fell stunned into the water, and there was he drowned. And then Beaumains spurred his horse upon the land, where the other knight fell upon him, and broke his spear. And so they drew their swords and fought long together. At the last Sir Beaumains clove his helm and his head down to the shoulders; and so he rode unto the damsel and bade her ride forth on her way.

"Alas," she said, "that ever a kitchen page should destroy two such good knights. Thou thinkest thou hast done well, but that is not so. The first knight's horse stumbled and so he was drowned in the water; and by mishap thou camest up behind the last knight, and slewest him. Fie, fie, foul kitchen knave, thou shalt soon see knights that shall beat down thy pride."

"Fair damsel, give me goodly language. Whatsoever knights they be, I fear them not. Ye may say what ye will, but wheresoever ye go I will follow you."

III. How Beaumains fought with the Black Knight, and the Green Knight, and the Red Knight.

So they rode till evening, and ever the lady rebuked him and would not rest. And then they came to a black land, and there was a black hawthorn whereon hung a black banner, and on the other side there hung a black shield, and by it stood a black spear, great and long, and a great black horse covered with silk, and a black stone near by. There sat a knight all armed in black, and his name was the Knight of the Black Lands.

"Damsel," he said, "have ye brought this knight of King Arthur to be your champion?"

"Nay, fair knight," said she, "this is but a kitchen knave, that was fed in King Arthur's kitchen."

"Why cometh he," said the knight, "in such array? It is shame that he beareth you company."

"Sir, I cannot be delivered of him," said she, "for with me he rideth in spite of me. Would that ye might rid me of him, for he is an unhappy knave, and unhappily he hath done this day: through mishap I saw him slay two knights at the passage of the water."

"I marvel," said the Black Knight, "that any man of honor will have ado with him."

"They know him not," said the damsel, "and because he rideth with me they think he is some man of honor."

"That may be," said the Black Knight; "nonetheless, he is full likely to be a strong man; but this much shall I grant you: I shall put him down upon foot, and he shall leave his horse and his gear with me."

When Sir Beaumains heard him say thus, he said,

"Sir knight, thou art full liberal with my horse and my gear. I let thee know that whether thou likest it or not I will pass this land in spite of thee; and therefore let see what thou canst do."

"Sayest thou that?" said the Black Knight. "Now yield thy lady from thee, for no kitchen page is fit to ride with such a lady."

"Thou liest," said Beaumains. "I am a gentleman born, and of more high lineage than thou, and that will I prove on thy body."

Then in great wrath they came together with their horses like thunder; and the Black Knight's spear broke, and Beaumains thrust him through both his sides, and therewith his spear broke off and left the shaft still in his side. But nevertheless the Black Knight drew his sword and smote many eager and mighty strokes, and hurt Beaumains full sore. But at the last within an hour and a half the Black Knight fell down off his horse in a swoon, and there he died. And Beaumains saw that he had been so well horsed and armed that he alit and armed him in the Black Knight's armor and took his horse, and so rode after the damsel.

When she saw him she said,

"Away, kitchen knave, out of the wind, for the smell of thy foul clothes grieveth me. Alas, that ever such a knave as thou art should by mishap slay so good a knight. But near here is one that shall pay thee back, and therefore I counsel thee, flee."

"It may happen," said Beaumains, "that I shall be beaten or slain; but I warn you, fair damsel, I will not flee away nor leave your company for all that ye can say; for ever ye say that they will kill me or beat me, but yet I escape and they lie on the ground. Therefore it were as good for you to cease thus all day rebuking me, for away will I not till I see the end of this journey, or else be slain or truly beaten."

Thus as they rode together, they saw a knight come toward them all in green, both his horse and his gear, and when he came nigh the damsel he asked her,

"Is that my brother the Black Knight that ye have brought with you?"

"Nay, nay," said she, "this unhappy kitchen knave hath slain your brother."

"Alas," said the Green Knight, "that is great pity, that so noble a knight as he was should so unhappily be slain, namely, by a knave's hand. Ah! traitor," said the Green Knight unto Beaumains, "thou shalt die for slaying my brother; he was a full noble knight, and his name was Sir Percard."

"I defy thee," said Beaumains, "for I let thee know I slew him knightly, and not shamefully."

Therewith the Green Knight rode unto a green horn that hung upon a thorn, and there he blew three deadly notes, and there came two damsels and armed him quickly. And then he took a great horse, and a green shield and a green spear. And then they ran together with all their mights, and broke their spears. And then they drew their swords, and gave many grievous strokes, and each of them wounded the other full ill. And at the last Beaumains' horse struck the Green Knight's horse upon the side, and he fell to the earth. When Beaumains saw that, he alit, and they rushed together like two mighty champions a long while, and much blood they bled both. With that came the damsel and said,

"My lord the Green Knight, why for shame stand ye so long fighting with the kitchen knave? Alas, it is shame that ever ye were made knight, to see such a lad match such a knight, as if the weed were to overgrow the grain."

Therewith the Green Knight was ashamed, and therewith he gave a great stroke of might, and clave Beaumains' shield through. When Beaumains saw his shield cloven asunder he was a little ashamed of that stroke, and of her language; and then he gave the Green Knight such a buffet upon the helm that he fell on his knees: and suddenly Beaumains pulled him to the ground groveling. And then the Green Knight begged for mercy.

"All is in vain," said Beaumains, "for thou shalt die unless this damsel that came with me pray me to save thy life."

And therewith he unlaced his helm, as if he would slay him.

"Fie upon thee, false kitchen page! I will never pray thee to save his life, for I never will be so much in thy debt."

"Then he shall die," said Beaumains.

"Thou wouldst not be so bold as to slay him, thou foul knave," said the damsel.

"Alas," said the Green Knight, "let me not die, when a fair word may save me. Fair knight, save my life, and I will forgive thee the death of my brother, and forever become thy man, and thirty knights that stand by me forever shall do thee service."

"In the devil's name," said the damsel, "that such a foul kitchen knave should have thee and thirty knights at his service."

"Sir knight," said Beaumains, "all this availeth thee not unless my damsel speak for thy life."

And therewith he made a pretense of slaying him.

"Let be," said the damsel, "thou foul knave, slay him not, for if thou do thou shalt repent it."

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "your charge is to me a pleasure, and at your commandment his life shall be saved."

Then he said,

"Sir knight with the green arms, I release thee at this damsel's request, for I will not make her wroth; I will fulfill all that she chargeth me."

And then the Green Knight kneeled down, and did him homage with his sword. Then said the damsel,

"I am sorry, Green Knight, for your defeat and for your brother's death; for of your help I had great need, for I greatly dread to pass this forest."

"Nay, dread you not," said the Green Knight, "for ye shall lodge with me this night, and tomorrow I shall help you through this forest."

So they took their horses and rode to his manor, and ever the damsel rebuked Beaumains, and would not let him sit at her table; but the Green Knight took him and seated him at a side table.

"I marvel," said the Green Knight to the damsel, "why ye rebuke this noble knight as ye do, for I warn you, damsel, he is a full noble knight, and I know no knight able to match him; therefore ye do wrong to rebuke him, for he shall do you right good service; for whatsoever he maketh of himself, he shall prove at the end to be of noble blood, and of king's lineage."

"Fie, fie," said the damsel, "it is shame for you to say of him such honor."

"Truly," said the Green Knight, "it were shame for me to say of him any dishonor, for he hath proved himself a better knight than I am, yet have I met with many knights in my days, and never to this time have I found a knight his match."

And so that night they went unto rest. And on the morn they all arose, and heard their mass and brake their fast, and then they took their horses and rode on their way, and the Green Knight conveyed them through the forest. And so they departed from the Green Knight. Then the damsel said unto Beaumains,

"Why dost thou follow me, thou kitchen boy? Cast away thy shield and thy spear and flee, or thou shalt say right soon, Alas!"

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "let him who is afeared flee, for it were shame to turn again since I have ridden so long with you."

"Well," said the damsel, "ye shall soon turn, whether ye will or not."

So within a while they saw a tower as white as any snow; and over the tower-gate there hung fifty shields of many colors; and under that tower there was a fair meadow. And therein were many knights and squires, for there upon the morn should be a great tournament; and the lord of the tower was in his castle, and looked out at a window, and saw a damsel, a dwarf, and a knight armed at all points.

"By my faith," said the lord, "with that knight will I joust, for I see he is a knight errant."

And so he armed him and horsed him hastily. And when he was on horseback with his shield and his spear, he was all in red. And when he came nigh Beaumains he thought it was his brother the Black Knight. And then he cried aloud,

"Brother, what do ye here?"

"Nay, nay," said the damsel, "it is not he; this is but a kitchen knave, that was brought up in King Arthur's court."

"Nevertheless," said the Red Knight, "I will speak with him."

"Ah," said the damsel, "this knave hath killed thy brother, and Sir Kay named him Beaumains, and this horse and harness was thy brother's. Also I saw thy brother the Green Knight overcome at his hands. Now may ye be revenged upon him."

With this both knights came together with all their might, and both their horses fell to the earth. Then they put their shields before them, and drew their swords, and each gave the other grievous strokes, now here, now there, hacking, hewing, parrying, and hurling like two boars, the space of two hours. And then the damsel cried on high to the Red Knight,

"Alas, thou noble Red Knight, let never a kitchen knave endure thee so long as he doth."

Then the Red Knight waxed wroth, and doubled his strokes, and hurt Beaumains wonderly sore, that the blood ran down to the ground and it was wonder to see that strong battle. Yet at the last Sir Beaumains struck him to the earth, and as he would have slain the Red Knight he cried mercy, saying,

"Noble knight, slay me not, and I shall forgive thee all the harm that thou hast done to me and the death of my brother the Black Knight."

"All this availeth not," said Sir Beaumains, "unless my damsel pray me to save thy life."

And therewith he made pretense to strike off his head.

"Let be, thou Beaumains, slay him not, for he is a noble knight."

Then Beaumains bade the Red Knight stand up, and thank the damsel for his life. Then the Red Knight prayed him to see his castle, and to stay there all night. So there they went. But always the damsel spoke many foul words unto Beaumains, whereof the Red Knight had great marvel. And upon the morn they heard mass, and broke their fast, and the Red Knight came before Beaumains with three score knights, and there he offered him his homage and fealty at all times, he and his knights.

"I thank you," said Beaumains, "but this ye shall grant me: when I call upon you, to come before my lord King Arthur, and yield you unto him to be his knights."

"Sir," said the Red Knight, "I and my fellowship shall be ready at your summons."

And so Beaumains and the damsel departed, and ever she rode chiding him in the foulest manner.

IV. How Sir Beaumains patiently suffered great rebukes of the damsel, and how he fought with Sir Persant of Inde.

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "ye are uncourteous to rebuke me as ye do, for I think I have done you good service. Ever ye threaten me I shall be overcome by knights that we meet, but ever it is they that lie in the dust or in the mire; and therefore I pray you rebuke me no more. When ye see me beaten, then may ye bid me go from you shamefully; but I were worse than a fool if I would depart from you while I were winning honor."

"Well," said she, "right soon thou shalt meet a knight that shall pay thee back, for he is the man of most honor of the world, except King Arthur."

"The more he is of honor," said Beaumains, "the more shall be my honor to have ado with him."

Then they saw before them a city rich and fair. And betwixt them and the city there was a fair meadow that seemed new mown, and therein were many pavilions fair to behold.

"Lo," said the damsel, "yonder is a lord that owneth yonder city, and his custom is when the weather is fair to wait in this meadow to joust and tourney. And ever there be about him five hundred knights and gentlemen-at-arms."

"That goodly lord," said Beaumains, "would I fain see."

"Thou shalt see him soon enough," said the damsel.

And so as she rode near she espied the pavilion where he was.

"Lo," said she, "seest thou yonder pavilion that is all of blue, the color of Inde, and everything about it all the color of Inde? His name is Sir Persant of Inde, the most lordly knight that ever thou lookedst on."

"It may well be," said Beaumains, "but be he never so stout a knight, I shall abide in this field till I see him under his shield."

"Ah, fool," said she, "thou were better to flee."

"Why," said Beaumains, "if he be such a knight as ye make him out to be, he will not set upon me with all his men, or with his five hundred knights. And if there come no more than one at once, I shall not fail whilst my life lasteth."

"Fie, fie," said the damsel, "that ever such a dirty knave should blow such a boast."

"Damsel," he said, "ye are to blame so to rebuke me, for I had rather do five battles than so to be rebuked; let him come and then let him do his worst."

"Sir," she said, "I marvel what thou art and of what kin thou art come: boldly thou speakest, and boldly thou hast done. Therefore I pray thee save thyself, for thy horse and thou have had great travail, and I fear we tarry too long from the siege, for it is but seven miles further, and here I fear lest ye shall catch some hurt, for Sir Persant of Inde is nothing of might nor strength next the knight that laid siege about my lady."

"Be it as it may," said Sir Beaumains, "since I am come so nigh this knight I will prove his might before I depart from him. And therefore, damsel, have ye no doubt by the grace of God that within two hours after noon I shall overcome him, and then shall we come to the siege by daylight."

"Oh Jesu," said the damsel, "I marvel what manner of man ye be, for never did woman treat knight so foul and shamefully as I have done you, and ever courteously ye have allowed me; and that came never but of a gentle blood."

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "the more ye said, the more ye angered me, and my wrath I wreaked upon them that I had ado with. Therefore ye furthered me in my battle. And though I had meat in King Arthur's kitchen, yet I might have had meat enough in other places; but all that I did to test my friends, and that shall be known another day. But whether I be a gentleman born or not, I let you know, fair damsel, I have done you gentleman's service."

"Alas," she said, "fair Beaumains, forgive me all that I have said or done against thee."

"With all my heart," said he, "I forgive it you, and since it pleaseth you to speak thus fair to me, know that it gladdeth mine heart greatly, and now I think there is no knight living but I am able enough for him."

With this, Sir Persant of Inde espied them and sent to discover whether they came in war or in peace.

"Say to thy lord, it shall be as he wish."

So the messenger went again unto Sir Persant, and told him his answer.

"Well, then will I have ado with him."

And so he rode against him. And Beaumains saw him and made him ready, and there they met as fast as ever their horses might run, and broke their spears each in three pieces, and their horses rushed so together that both their horses fell dead to the earth. Then quickly they leaped from their horses and put their shields before them and drew their swords, and gave many great strokes, and sometimes they hurtled so together that they fell groveling on the ground. Thus they fought two hours and more until at the last Sir Beaumains smote Sir Persant through the side of the body, and then he smote him upon the helm so that he fell groveling to the earth; and then he leapt upon him and unlaced his helm to have slain him. Then Sir Persant yielded him and asked mercy. With that came the damsel, and prayed to save his life.

"I will, for it were pity that this noble knight should die."

"Gramercy," said Persant, "gentle knight and damsel. For certainly now I know well it was ye who slew my brother the Black Knight at the black thorn; he was a full noble knight, and his name was Sir Percard. Also I am sure that ye are he that won mine other brother the Green Knight; his name is Sir Pertolepe. Also ye won my brother the Red Knight, Sir Perimones. And now since ye have won these, this shall I do to please you: ye shall have homage and fealty from me, and a hundred knights, to be always at your commandment, to go and ride where ye will command us."

And so they went unto Sir Persant's pavilion and drank wine and ate spices, and after supper to bed. And on the morn the damsel and Sir Beaumains heard mass and broke their fast, and readied themselves to leave.

"Fair damsel," said Persant, "whither are ye leading this knight?"

"Sir," she said, "this knight is going to the siege that surroundeth my lady."

"Ah, ah," said Persant, "that is the Knight of the Red Lands, the most perilous knight that I know now living, and a man without mercy. God save you," said he to Beaumains, "from that knight, for he doth great wrong to that lady, and that is great pity, for she is one of the fairest ladies of the world, and I think that your damsel is her sister. Is not your name Linet?" said he.

"Yea, sir," said she, "and my sister's name is Dame Liones."

"This Red Knight of the Red Lands hath lain long at the siege, and ever he prolongeth the time so that he might have Sir Launcelot of the Lake to do battle with him, or Sir Tristram, or Sir Lamorak of Galis, or Sir Gawaine."

"Now, my lord Sir Persant of Inde," said the damsel Linet, "I require that ye will make this gentleman knight before he fights with the Red Knight."

"I will with all my heart," said Sir Persant, "if it will please him to take the order of knighthood from so simple a man as I am."

"Sir," said Beaumains, "I thank you for your good will, but the noble knight Sir Launcelot has made me knight."

"Ah," said Persant, "ye might not be made knight by a more renowned knight, for of all knights he is called chief of knighthood. Also all the world saith that betwixt three knights all knighthood is clearly divided: that is Launcelot of the Lake, Sir Tristram of Liones, and Sir Lamorak of Galis. Therefore God speed you well, for if ye may match the Red Knight ye shall be called the fourth of the world."

"Sir," said Beaumains, "now if ye and this damsel will not reveal it, I will tell you of what kin I am."

"We will not expose you," said they both, "by the faith we owe unto God."

"Truly, then," said he, "my name is Gareth of Orkney, and King Lot was my father, and my mother is King Arthur's sister; Sir Gawaine and Sir Agravaine and Sir Gaheris are my brothers, and I am the youngest of them all. And as yet neither King Arthur, nor Sir Gawaine know what I am."

V. How the damsel and Beaumains came to the siege, and how Beaumains fought with the Red Knight of the Red Lawns.

Then the dwarf brought word to the lady that was besieged that her sister was come and a knight with her.

"What manner of man is he?" said the lady.

"He is a noble knight, madam," said the dwarf, "and but a young man, but he is as likely a man as ever ye saw."

"Of what kin is he come," said the lady, "and by whom was he made knight?"

"Madam," said the dwarf, "he is the king's son of Orkney, but I will not tell you his name at this time; but know that he was made knight by Sir Launcelot."

"How escaped he from the brethren of Persant?" said the lady.

"Madam," he said, "as a noble knight should."

"Dwarf," said the lady, "I am glad of these tidings; therefore go thou to my hermitage near by, and there shalt thou bear with thee wine and bread and venison and fowls. And then go thou unto my sister and greet her well, and commend me unto that gentle knight, and pray him to eat and to drink, and make him strong. Also pray him that he be of good heart and good courage, for he shall meet with a full noble knight, but he is neither bounteous nor courteous nor gentle, for he thinketh of nothing but murder, and that is the cause I cannot praise him nor love him."

And so within a little while the damsel Linet and Sir Beaumains came to that hermitage, and there they drank the wine and ate the venison and the fowls. And when the dwarf returned again unto the castle, there met with him the Red Knight of the Red Lands, and asked him from whence he came.

"Sir," said the dwarf, "I have been with my lady's sister, and she hath been at King Arthur's court, and brought a knight with her."

"Then her labor is but lost; even had she brought with her Sir Launcelot, Sir Tristram, Sir Lamorak, or Sir Gawaine, I would think myself good enough for them all."

"That may well be," said the dwarf, "but this knight hath passed all the perilous passages; he hath slain the Black Knight, and two more, and won the Green Knight, the Red Knight and the Blue Knight."

"Then he is one of the four I have mentioned."

"He is none of those," said the dwarf, "but he is a king's son."

"What is his name?" said the Red Knight of the Red Lands.

"That I will not tell you," said the dwarf.

"I care not," said the knight, "for he shall have a shameful death, as many others have had."

"It is marvel," said the dwarf, "that ye make such shameful war upon noble knights."

Beaumains lay all night in the hermitage, and upon the morn he and the damsel Linet heard their mass, and broke their fast. And then they took their horses and rode throughout a fair forest, and then they came to a plain, and saw where there were many pavilions and tents, and a fair castle, and there was much smoke and great noise. And when they came near the siege Sir Beaumains espied upon great trees how there hung by the neck goodly armed men, with their shields about their necks, and their swords, and gilt spurs upon their heels, and so there hung shamefully nigh forty knights with full rich arms. Then Sir Beaumains' countenance fell, and he said,

"What meaneth this?"

"Fair sir," said the damsel, "ye must encourage yourself in spite of this sight, or else ye be lost, for all these knights came hither to this siege to rescue my sister Dame Liones, and when the Red Knight of the Red Lands had overcome them he put them to this shameful death, without mercy or pity. And in the same way will he serve you, unless ye fare better than they."

"Now Jesu defend me," said Sir Beaumains, "from such a villainous death and disgrace of arms, for I would rather be slain manly in plain battle than to fare thus."

"Trust him not," said the damsel, "for in him is no courtesy; and that is a pity, for he is a full likely man, well made of body, a full noble knight of prowess, and a lord of great lands and possessions."

"He may well be a good knight," said Beaumains, "but he hath shameful customs, and it is marvel that none of the noble knights of my lord Arthur have dealt with him."

And then they rode to the walls and saw, near by, a sycamore tree, whereon hung a horn, the greatest that ever they saw, of an elephant's bone, and this Knight of the Red Lands had hanged it up there, so that if there came any knight errant he must blow that horn, and then would he make him ready, and come to him to do battle.

"But Sir, I pray you," said the damsel Linet, "blow ye not the horn till it be high noon, for before that time his might increaseth till, as men say, he hath seven men's strength."

"Ah, fie for shame, fair damsel; if he were as good a knight as ever was, yet should I test him at his most powerful, for either I will win honor honorably, or die knightly in the field."

And therewith he spurred his horse straight to the sycamore tree, and blew the horn so eagerly that all the siege and the castle rang thereof. And then there leapt out knights from their tents and pavilions, and those within the castle looked over the walls and out the windows. Then the Red Knight of the Red Lands armed him hastily, and two barons set his spurs upon his heels, and all was blood-red, his armor, spear, and shield. And an earl buckled his helm upon his head, and then they brought him a red steed, and so he rode into a little vale under the castle, so that all that were in the castle and at the siege might behold the battle.

" Sir," said the damsel Linet unto Sir Beaumains, "look ye, for yonder is your deadly enemy, and at yonder window is my sister."

"Where?" said Beaumains.

"Yonder," said the damsel, and pointed with her finger.

"She seems from afar the fairest lady that ever I looked upon," said Beaumains, "and truly, I ask nothing better than to do battle for her now, for truly she shall be my lady, and for her I will fight."

And ever he looked up to the window with glad countenance. With that the Red Knight of the Red Lands called to Sir Beaumains,

"Leave thy looking, sir knight, and behold me, for I warn thee she is my lady, and for her I have done many strong battles."

"If thou hast done so," said Beaumains, "it was but waste labor, for she loveth none of thy attentions, and for thou to love one that loveth thee not, is but great folly. For if I understood that she were not glad of my coming, I would think twice before I did battle for her. But I understand that by the besieging of this castle, thou hast lost her good favor. And therefore, thou Red Knight of the Red Lands, know that I love her and will rescue her, or else die."

"Sayest thou that?" said the Red Knight; "thou ought to beware by reason of yonder knights that thou sawest hang upon yonder trees."

"Fie for shame," said Beaumains, "that ever thou shouldst say or do such evil; thou shamest thyself and knighthood, and thou mayest be sure there will no lady love thee that knoweth thy wicked customs. Thou thinkest that the sight of these hanged knights should frighten me. Not so; that shameful sight causeth me to have courage and hardiness against thee, more than I would have had against thee if thou wert a well-ruled knight."

"Make thee ready," said the Red Knight of the Red Lands, "and talk no longer."

Then Sir Beaumains bade the damsel go from him, and they put their spears in their rests and came together with all their might and smote each other in the midst of their shields, so that they fell to the earth both, and lay a great while sore stunned; and all those that were in the castle thought their necks had been broken, and many said the strange knight was a big man and a noble jouster, for till now no knight could match the Red Knight of the Red Lands.

Then they got free of their horses and put their shields before them, and drew their swords, and ran together like two fierce lions, and gave each other such buffets upon their helms that they reeled backward two strides, and then they recovered and hewed great pieces from their armor and their shields. And thus they fought till it was past noon and they both lacked wind, and then they stood panting, blowing, and bleeding, that all that beheld them wept for pity. And when they had rested a while they went to battle again, dodging, striking, and parrying, as two boars. And sometimes they ran at each other like two rams, and hurtled together so that they fell groveling to the earth; and sometimes they were so confused that each took the other's sword instead of his own. Thus they battled on until at the last Beaumains smote the sword out of the Red Knight's hand, and then he smote him upon the helm so that he fell to the earth, and Sir Beaumains fell upon him and unlaced his helm to have slain him; and then he asked mercy, saying with a loud voice,

"O noble knight, I yield me to thy mercy."

Then Sir Beaumains thought of the knights that he had made to be hanged shamefully, and he said,

"I may not with honor save thy life, because of the shameful deaths thou hast caused many good knights to die."

"Sir," said the Red Knight of the Red Lands, "hold your hand and ye shall know the causes why I put them to so shameful a death."

"Say on," said Sir Beaumains.

"Sir, I loved once a lady, a fair damsel, and her brother was slain, and she said it was done by Sir Launcelot of the Lake or else Sir Gawaine, and she begged me that I would promise to labor daily in arms until I met with one of them, and all that I might overcome I should put unto a villainous death."

"Then," said Beaumains, "insomuch as all that ye did was at a lady's request, I blame you the less, and ye shall have your life upon this condition: that ye go within the castle and yield you to the lady, and if she will forgive you, I will. And when that is done, that ye go unto the court of King Arthur, and there ask Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine mercy for the evil will ye have had against them."

"Sir," said the Red Knight of the Red Lands, "all this will I do as ye command."

And then the maiden Linet came to Sir Beaumains and unarmed him and treated his wounds, and she did likewise unto the Red Knight. And so within a while the Red Knight of the Red Lands went unto the castle and put him in the good graces of the lady Liones, and she forgave him. And then he departed unto the court of King Arthur, and there he put him in the mercy of Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine, and there he told openly how he was overcome and by whom.

"Jesu mercy," said King Arthur and Sir Gawaine, "we marvel much of what kin he is come, for he is a noble knight."

"Have no marvel," said Sir Launcelot, "for he is come of a full noble blood, and there be but few now living so mighty as he is, and so noble of prowess."

"It seemeth," said King Arthur, "that ye know his name, and of what blood he is."

"I suppose I do so," said Launcelot, "or else I would not have given him the order of knighthood; but he charged me at that time that I should not reveal it."

Now turn we unto Sir Beaumains, who desired of Linet that he might see her sister, his lady.

"Sir," said she, "I would fain ye saw her."

Then Sir Beaumains armed him, and took his horse and his spear, and rode straight unto the castle. And when he came to the gate he found there many armed men, and they pulled up the drawbridge. Then he marvelled why they would not let him enter. And then he looked up to the window, and there he saw the fair Liones, that said,

"Go thy way, Sir Beaumains, for thou shalt not wholly have my love until the time that thou be called one of the worthy knights. And therefore go labor in honor this twelvemonth, and then thou shalt hear new tidings."

"Alas, fair lady," said Beaumains, "I have not deserved that ye should show me this strangeness; I had thought that I should have right good cheer with you, and I am sure I have bought your love with part of the best blood within my body."

"Fair courteous knight," said Dame Liones, "be not displeased nor over hasty; your great labor nor good love shall not be lost. Therefore go on your way, and be of good comfort, for all this shall be to your honor, and a twelvemonth will soon be done, and trust me, fair knight, I shall be true to you, and never betray you, but to my death I shall love you and none other."

And so it was that Sir Beaumains rode away from the castle, and for the space of a year he did many deeds of honor. And as the year came to an end and it drew fast unto Michaelmas, thither to the court of King Arthur came Dame Liones and her sister Dame Linet. And upon Michaelmas Day the bishop of Canterbury made the wedding betwixt Sir Gareth, that was called Beaumains, and the lady Liones, with great solemnity. And King Arthur caused Sir Gaheris, that was brother to Sir Gareth, to wed Dame Linet. And King Arthur caused Sir Agravaine, that was also brother to Gareth, to wed Dame Liones' niece, a fair lady; her name was Dame Laurel. And so when this solemnization was done, then came in the Green Knight, Sir Pertolepe, with thirty knights, and there he did homage to Sir Gareth. Then came in the Red Knight with three score knights with him, and did to Gareth homage. Then came in Sir Persant of Inde, with a hundred knights with him, and there he did homage. And then came in the Red Knight of the Red Lands, that was called Sir Ironside, and he brought with him three hundred knights, and there he did homage.

So then the kings and queens, princes and earls, barons and many bold knights went unto meat; and well may ye know there was all manner of meat in great plenty, all manner of revels and games, with all manner of minstrelsy that was accustomed in those days. Also there was great jousting, for three days. But the king would not allow Sir Gareth to joust, because of his new bride.

Thus endeth this tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney that wedded Dame Liones. And also Sir Gaheris wedded her sister, Dame Linet. And Sir Agravaine wedded Dame Laurel, a fair lady and great. And mighty lands with great riches did King Arthur give them all, that royally they might live till their lives' end.

PART THREE

OF THE QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL, AND OF SIR GALAHAD THAT ACHIEVED IT

It befell that before the time that Sir Galahad was born, there came a hermit unto King Arthur upon Whitsunday, as the knights sat at the Table Round. And when the hermit saw the Seat Perilous he asked the king and all the knights why that seat was empty. Then King Arthur answered for all the knights and said,

"There shall none sit in that seat but one, without he be destroyed."

Then said the hermit,

"Sir, know ye who he is?"

"Nay," said King Arthur and all the knights, "we know not yet who he is that shall sit there."

"Then I know," said the hermit. "For he that shall sit there is yet unborn, and this same year he shall be born that shall sit in that Seat Perilous, and he shall win the Holy Grail."

When this hermit had made this mention he departed from the court of King Arthur. And after this feast Sir Launcelot rode from the court in search of adventures till on a time he came to a fair castle, and therewithal came the king of the castle and saluted Sir Launcelot and he him again.

"Now, fair knight," said the king, "what is your name?"

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "my name is Sir Launcelot of the Lake.

"And my name," said the other, "is King Pelles, king of this land."

And then each of them made much of the other, and so they went into the castle to take their repast. And at once there came in at a window a dove, and in her mouth there seemed a little censer of gold, and therewithal there was such a rich scent as if all the spices of the world had been there. And forthwith there was upon the table all manner of meats and drinks that they might think of.

And then there came in a damsel, exceeding fair and young, and she bore a vessel of gold between her hands; and thereto the king kneeled devoutly and said his prayers, and so did all that were there.

"Ah, Jesu," said Sir Launcelot, "what may this mean?"

"Sir," said the king, "this is the richest thing that any living man hath, and when word of this thing goeth abroad the Round Table shall be broken for a time. Know thou well," said the king, "this is the Holy Grail that ye have here seen, from which our Lord Jesu Christ did eat at the Last Supper.

So the king and Sir Launcelot that day spent most of their time together.

And it happened that King Pelles had a fair daughter that was called Elaine, and she loved Sir Launcelot well. But Sir Launcelot loved no lady in the world but only Queen Guenever. So by the help of one of the greatest enchantresses that was at that time living, Sir Launcelot was given a potion that made him to think that the maiden Elaine had been Queen Guenever, and at that Sir Launcelot was glad, and so was the lady Elaine. And after a time, when Sir Launcelot had departed, she was delivered of a fair child, and they christened him Galahad. And that child was well kept and well nourished.

Then as it fell by fortune and adventure, Sir Bors of Ganis that was nephew unto Sir Launcelot came to King Pelles' castle, and when the king and Elaine, his daughter, knew that Sir Bors was nephew unto Sir Launcelot they made him great cheer. But ever Sir Bors beheld the child in the arms of the king's daughter, and ever it seemed he was much like Sir Launcelot.

"Truly," said Elaine, "this is his son."

Then Sir Bors wept for joy, and prayed to God he might prove as good a knight as his father.

And so there came in a white dove, and she bore a little censer of gold in her mouth, and there was all manner of meats and drinks. And a maiden bore in the Holy Grail, and she said there openly,

"Know, Sir Bors, that this child, Sir Galahad, shall sit in the Seat Perilous and achieve the Holy Grail, and he shall be much better than his father, Sir Launcelot."

And then they kneeled down and said their prayers, and there was such a scent as if all the spices in the world had been there. And as the dove had taken her flight, the maiden vanished as she came, with the Holy Grail.

And so on the morn Sir Bors departed and rode unto Camelot. And there he found Sir Launcelot, and told him of the adventures that he had seen with King Pelles.

And then noise sprang up in King Arthur's court that Sir Launcelot had a child by the daughter of King Pelles, wherefore Queen Guenever was wroth, and she gave many rebukes to Sir Launcelot and called him false knight. And then Sir Launcelot told the queen all, and how he had been deceived by enchantment; and so the queen held Sir Launcelot excused.

And it befell that some years afterward, when it was the vigil of Pentecost, all the fellowship of the Round Table were come unto Camelot. And when they had heard their service, and the tables were set ready with meat and drink, right so there entered into the hall a fair gentlewoman on horseback, that had ridden full fast, for her horse was all besweated. Then she there alit, and came before the king and saluted him. And he said,

"Damsel, God thee bless."

"Sir," said she, "tell me where Sir Launcelot is."

"Yonder ye may see him," said the king.

Then she went unto Launcelot and said,

"Sir Launcelot, I salute you on King Pelles' behalf, and I require you come with me hereby into a forest."

Then Sir Launcelot asked her,

"What will ye with me?"

"Ye shall know," said she, "when ye come thither."

"Well," said he, "I will gladly go with you." So Sir Launcelot bade his squire saddle his horse and bring his arms. Then came the queen unto Launcelot, and said,

"Will ye leave us at this high feast?"

"Madam," said the gentlewoman, "know ye well he shall be with you tomorrow by dinner time."

"If I knew," said the queen, "that he should not be with us here tomorrow, he should not go with you by my good will."

Right so departed Sir Launcelot with the gentlewoman, and rode until he came into a forest and into a great valley, where they saw an abbey of nuns; and there was a squire ready and opened the gates, and so they entered and descended off their horses. And there came a fair fellowhip about Sir Launcelot, and welcomed him, and were passing glad of his coming.

And then they led him unto the Abbess's chamber and unarmed him; and right so he was aware that upon a bed were lying two of his cousins, Sir Bors and Sir Lionel, and then he waked them; and when they saw him they made great joy.

In the meanwhile there came therein twelve nuns that brought with them Galahad, who was passing fair and well made, that scarcely in the world men might not find his match; and all those ladies wept.

"Sir," said they all, "we bring you here this child of fifteen years which we have nourished, and we pray you to make him a knight, for of a more worthier man's hand may he not receive the order of knighthood."

Sir Launcelot beheld the young squire and saw him seemly and demure as a dove, with all manner of good features, so that he thought never to have seen so fair a man of his age. Then said Sir Launcelot,

"Cometh this desire of himself?"

He and all they said yea.

"Then shall he," said Sir Launcelot, "receive the high order of knighthood tomorrow morning at the high feast."

That night Sir Launcelot had passing good cheer; and on the morn, at Galahad's desire, he made him knight and said,

"God make him a good man, for of beauty he hath no equal among any that now liveth."

Then said Sir Launcelot,

"Now fair sir, will ye come with me unto the court of King Arthur?"

"Nay," said he, "I will not go with you at this time."

Then Sir Launcelot departed and took his two cousins with him, and so they came unto Camelot by the hour of nine in the morning on Whitsunday. And when the king and all the knights were come from services, the barons espied in the seats of the Round Table, all written with gold letters, "Here ought such a one to sit," and "Another ought to sit here," and thus they went along until they came to the Seat Perilous, where they found letters newly written with gold, that said,

FOUR HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FOUR YEARS AFTER THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESU CHRIST OUGHT THIS SEAT TO BE FILLED.

Then they all said,

"This is a marvellous and an adventurous thing."

"In the name of God," said Sir Launcelot, and he counted the time from the passion of our Lord unto that day, "it seemeth that this seat ought to be filled this same day, for this is the feast of Pentecost after the four hundred and fifty-fourth year; and if it would displease none, I would that none of these letters were seen this day, till he is come that ought to sit here."

Then they brought a cloth of silk to cover the letters in the Seat Perilous.

"Now may ye go to your dinner," said Sir Kay unto the king, "for a marvellous adventure have ye seen." So the king and all went to their meat, and every knight knew his own place, and set him therein, and young men that were knights served them. So when they were served, and all the seats were filled save only the Seat Perilous, there at once befell a marvellous adventure: that all the doors and the windows of the palace shut by themselves. But the hall was not greatly darkened, and therefore they had great marvel. Then came in a good old man clothed all in white, and there was no knight knew from whence he came; and with him he brought a young knight in red arms. Then the old man said unto Arthur,

"Sir, I bring here a young knight which is of king's lineage, by whom the marvels of this court and of strange realms shall be fully accomplished."

The king was right glad of his words, and said unto the good man, "Sir, ye be right welcome, and the young knight with you."

Then the old man made the young man to unarm himself; and he was in a coat of red silk, and bore a mantle upon his shoulder that was furred with ermine, and he put that upon him. And the old knight said unto the young knight,

"Sir, follow me."

And at once he led him unto the Seat Perilous, beside which sat Sir Launcelot, and the good man lifted up the cloth, and found there letters that said thus:

THIS IS THE SEAT OF GALAHAD, THE HIGH PRINCE.

"Sir," said the old knight, "know that this place is yours."

And then he set him down surely in that seat. And then Galahad said to the old man,

"Sir, ye may now go your way, for well have ye done as ye were commanded to do."

So the good man departed, and there met him twenty noble squires, and so they took their horses and went their way.

Then all the knights of the Table Round marvelled greatly at Sir Galahad, that he dared sit there in that Seat Perilous, and was so tender of age, and they said,

"This is he by whom the Holy Grail shall be achieved, for none ever sat there but he, without he were destroyed."

Soon afterward, on a day, the king and all the knights espied where came riding toward them a lady on a white palfrey. And she saluted the king and the queen, and then said,

"Sir king, I bring thee word that there shall befall thee the greatest honor that ever befell king in Britain; for this day the Holy Grail shall appear in thy house, and feed thee and all thy fellowship of the Round Table.'

So she departed and went that same way that she came.

"Now," said the king, "I am sure that for this quest of the Holy Grail all ye of the Table Round shall depart, and never shall I see you again together."

Then the king and all went to vespers in the great church, and so after that to supper, and every knight sat in his own place. Then at once they heard cracking of thunder, and in the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more clear by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were lighted by the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but there was none might see it, nor who bore it. And all the hall was filled with good odors, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world; and when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, then the holy vessel departed suddenly, and they knew not whither.

Then had they all breath to speak. And then the king yielded thanks to God for His good grace that He had sent them.

"Now," said Sir Gawaine, "we have been served this day with whatsoever meats and drinks we thought on; but one thing beguiled us: we might not see the Holy Grail, it was so preciously covered. Wherefore I will make a vow, that tomorrow, without abiding longer, I shall labor in the quest of the Holy Grail, and never shall I return again unto the court till I have seen it more openly than it hath been seen here."

When they of the Table Round heard Sir Gawaine say so, they arose and made such vows as Sir Gawaine had made. As soon as King Arthur heard this he was greatly displeased, for he knew well that they might not take back their vows.

"Alas!" said King Arthur unto Sir Gawaine, "ye have nigh slain me with the vow and promise that ye have made. For ye have bereft me of the fairest fellowship and the truest knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world. For when they depart, I am sure they all shall never more meet in this world, for many shall die in the quest. I have loved them as well as my life, wherefore it shall grieve me right sore, the breaking of this fellowship; for I have had an old custom to have them in my fellowship."

And therewith the tears filled his eyes. And then he said,

"Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have set me in great sorrow, for I have great doubt that my true fellowship shall ever meet here more again."

"Ah," said Sir Launcelot, "comfort yourself, for it shall be unto us a great honor, and much more than if we died in any other way."

"Ah, Launcelot," said the king, "the great love that I have had for you all the days of my life maketh me to say such sorrowful words; for never a Christian King had so many worthy men at his table as I have had this day at the Round Table."

Then the king would know how many had undertaken the quest of the Holy Grail, and there were a hundred and fifty, and all were knights of the Round Table. And then they departed on the morrow with weeping and mourning, and every knight took the way that he liked best. And the most part had many marvellous adventures, but never one achieved the Holy Grail.

And also Galahad rode many journeys in vain, and at the last he met with Sir Percivale and Sir Bors. Then rode they a great while till they came to the castle of King Pelles. And when they were entered within the castle the king knew them. Then there was great joy, for they knew well that by their coming they had fulfilled the quest of the Holy Grail. And all at once there came a voice among them, and said, "They that ought not to sit at the table of Jesu Christ arise, for now shall true knights be fed."

So all went thence except the three knights and King Pelles and Eliazer his son, which were holy men. Therewith the voice said,

"There be two among you that be not in the quest of the Holy Grail, and therefore depart ye."

Then King Pelles and his son departed. And therewithal it seemed to them that there came a man clothed in likeness of a bishop, with a cross in his hand, and four angels bore him in a chair and set him down before the table of silver whereupon the Holy Grail was. Then they heard the chamber door open, and there they saw more angels; and two bore candles of wax, and the third a towel, and the fourth a spear that bled marvellously, that three drops fell within a box which he held with his other hand.

Then looked they, and saw a man come out of the Holy Grail, that had all the signs of the passion of Jesu Christ, bleeding all openly, and said,

"My knights, and my servants, and my true children, which are come out of earthly life into spiritual life, I will now no longer hide me from you, but ye shall see now a part of my secrets: now receive the holy food which ye have so much desired."

Then took He the Holy Grail, and came to Galahad, and Galahad kneeled down and there received the blessed sacrament, and after him so did his fellows; and they thought it so sweet that it was marvellous to tell. Then said He unto Galahad,

"Son, knowest thou what I hold betwixt my hands?"

"Nay," said he, "unless Ye will tell me."

"This is," said He, "the holy dish where from I ate the lamb at the Last Supper. And now hast thou seen what thou most desiredst to see, but yet hast thou not seen it as openly as thou shalt see it. Therefore go ye tomorrow unto the sea, where ye shall find a ship ready, and take no more with you, but Sir Percivale and Sir Bors. And two of you shall die in my service, but one of you shall come again, and tell tidings."

Then gave He them His blessing and vanished away. Right so departed Galahad, Percivale, and Bors. And so they rode three days, and then they came to the sea, and found the ship. And when they came on board, they found the table of silver which they had left behind, and on it the Holy Grail, which was covered with red samite. Then were they glad to have such things in their fellowship, and so they entered, and made great reverence thereto, and Galahad fell in prayer long time to our Lord, asking that at whatsoever time he desired, he should pass out of this world: so he prayed, till a voice said to him,

"Galahad, thou shalt have thy request, and when thou askest the death of thy body thou shalt have it, and then shalt thou find the life of the soul."

Percivale heard this, and prayed him to tell him wherefore he asked such things.

"That shall I tell you," said Galahad: "the other day when we saw a part of the adventures of the Holy Grail, I was in such joy of heart that never earthly man was, and therefore I know well that when my body is dead my soul shall be in great joy to see the blessed Trinity every day, and the majesty of our Lord Jesu Christ."

And when they landed they took out of the ship the table of silver, and right so they went to a city, which was called Sarras, and at the gate of the city they saw an old stooped man. Then Galahad called him, and bade him help to bear the heavy table.

"Truly," said the old man, "it is ten years since I might go without crutches."

"Care thou not," said Galahad, "and arise up and show thy good will."

And so he tried, and found himself as whole as ever he was. Then ran he to the table, and took one end. And at once arose there great noise in the city, that a cripple was made whole by marvellous knights that entered into the city.

And when the king of the city, which was a tyrant, heard this, he took them and put them in prison in a deep hole. But as soon as they were there, our Lord sent them the Holy Grail, through whose grace they were always nourished while they were in prison. So at the year's end it befell that this king lay sick, and felt that he should die. Then he sent for the three knights, and they came before him, and he begged forgiveness for that which he had done to them, and they forgave him goodly, and soon he died.

When the king was dead, all the city was dismayed, and knew not who might be their king. Right so as they were in counsel, there came a voice among them, and bade them choose the youngest knight of the three to be their king. So they made Galahad king by the assent of the whole city. And then Galahad caused to be made about the table of silver a chest of gold and of precious stones that covered also the Holy Grail, and every day early the three fellows would come before it and say their prayers.

Now at the year's end, Galahad arose up early, and his fellows, and came to the palace, and saw before them the Holy Grail, and a man kneeling on his knees, in the likeness of the bishop, that had about him a great fellowship of angels, as if it had been Jesu Christ himself. And then the bishop arose and began a mass of Our Lady. And when he had done, at once he called Galahad, and said to him,

"Come forth, thou servant of Jesu Christ, and thou shalt see what thou hast much desired to see."

And then Galahad began to tremble right hard, when the earthly flesh began to behold the spiritual things. Then he held up his hands toward heaven, and said, "Lord, I thank thee, for now I see that which hath been my desire many a day. Now, blessed Lord, would I not longer live, if it might please thee, Lord."

And therewith the bishop took the bread that was our Lord's body betwixt his hands, and proferred it to Galahad, and he received it right gladly and meekly. And then Galahad went to Percivale and kissed him, and commended him to God. And so he went to Sir Bors and kissed him, and commended him to God, and said,

"Fair lord, salute me to my lord Sir Launcelot, my father, and as soon as ye see him, bid him remember of this unstable world."

And therewith he kneeled down before the table and said his prayers, and then suddenly his soul departed to Jesu Christ, and a great multitude of angels bore his soul up to heaven, and the two fellows could well behold it. Also the two fellows saw come from heaven a hand, but they saw not the body, and it came right to the Holy Grail, and took it, and so bore it up to heaven.

When Percivale and Bors saw Galahad dead, they made as much sorrow as ever did two men: and if they had not been good men they might quickly have fallen in despair. And when Galahad was buried, Sir Percivale went unto a hermitage and put on religious clothing; and Bors went with him, but never changed he his secular clothing, for he would go again unto King Arthur's court. Thus a year and two months lived Sir Percivale in the hermitage a full holy life, and then passed out of this world. And Bors buried him by Galahad, and then he departed and rode till he came to Camelot where the king was. And then was there great joy made of him, for they all had thought that he was dead. And then Bors told of the adventures of the Holy Grail that had befallen him and Percivale and Galahad.

But since that time was there never man so bold as to say that he had seen the Holy Grail.

PART FOUR

OF THE DEATH OF ARTHUR, AND OF THE BREAKING OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TABLE ROUND

After the quest of the Holy Grail was fulfilled, and all knights that were left alive were come again unto the Table Round, King Arthur and Queen Guenever made great joy of the remnant that were come home. And passing glad were the king and the queen of Sir Launcelot and of Sir Bors, for they had been long away at the quest of the Holy Grail. Then Sir Launcelot began to resort unto Queen Guenever again. And ever his thoughts were privately on the queen, and now they loved more than they did before, so that many in the court spoke of it, and in especial Sir Agravaine, Sir Gawaine's brother, for he was ever open-mouthed. And every night and day Sir Agravaine lay in wait for Queen Guenever and Sir Launcelot of the Lake, to put them to a rebuke and shame.

Thus the knights and ladies lived in the court, with great nobleness and joy, long time, until one May it befell that a great anger arose that never ceased till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain: and all was due to two unhappy knights, which were named Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, that were brethren unto Sir Gawaine. For Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred had ever a private hate for Queen Guenever and for Sir Launcelot. So it happened that Sir Agravaine said openly unto his brethren,

"I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Launcelot goeth with the queen; it is shame that we all should allow so noble a king as King Arthur is to be so shamed."

Then spoke Sir Gawaine and said,

"Brother, Sir Agravaine, I pray you, bring no such matters before me more; for know that I will not be of your opinion."

"Nor will we," said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth.

"Then will I," said Sir Mordred.

"I believe that well," said Sir Gawaine, "for ever ye incline unto all unhappiness, brother Sir Mordred. I would that ye left all this, and made you not so busy, for I know what will come of it."

"Come of it what may," said Sir Agravaine, "I will disclose it to the king."

"Not by my advice," said Sir Gawaine, "for if there arise war betwixt Sir Launcelot and us, there will many kings and great lords side with Sir Launcelot."

"I will hide it no longer," said Sir Agravaine.

With these words came to them King Arthur.

"Now, brother, cease your noise," said Sir Gawaine.

"We will not," said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred.

"Then," said Sir Gawaine, "I will not hear your tales."

"Nor will we," said Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris.

And therewithal they three departed, making great grief.

"Alas," said Sir Gawaine and Sir Gareth, "now is this realm wholly undone, and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be dispersed."

Then Sir Agravaine said unto King Arthur,

"My lord, I shall tell you what I may keep no longer. I and my brother, Sir Mordred, know how Sir Launcelot regardeth your queen, and we be your sister's sons, and we may allow it no longer. Therefore, we will prove it that he is a traitor to your person."

"I would be loath to believe such a thing," said King Arthur, "unless I had proofs upon it; for all ye know Sir Launcelot is the best knight among us all." And truly the king was full loath to have any rumors about Sir Launcelot and his queen; for the king had a suspicion, but he would not hear of it, for Sir Launcelot had done much for him and for the queen so many times that the king loved him well.

"My lord," said Sir Agravaine, "ye shall ride tomorrow out hunting, and doubt ye not, Sir Launcelot will not go with you. Then we shall surprise him with the queen."

So on the morn, King Arthur rode hunting. Then Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred gathered to them twelve knights, and hid themselves in a chamber. Then Sir Launcelot told Sir Bors how he would go and speak with the queen.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "I mistrust that the king is absent from the queen because, peradventure, he hath laid some trap for you and the queen. I ever fear Sir Agravaine, that waiteth daily to do you shame."

"Have ye no fear," said Sir Launcelot.

So he departed, and took his sword under his arm, and so he passed till he came to the queen's chamber. And then there came Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, with twelve knights of the Round Table, and they cried,

"Traitor knight, Sir Launcelot of the Lake, now art thou taken."

"Alas," said Queen Guenever, "now are we both brought to grief."

"Madam," said Sir Launcelot, "is there here any armor within your chamber?"

"Truly," said the queen, "I have neither armor, shield, sword, nor spear, wherefore I fear me our long love is come to an end; for I hear by their noise that there be many noble knights, and they be well-armed."

And ever Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred cried,

"Traitor knight, come out of the queen's chamber, for know that thou shalt not escape."

"O Jesu mercy," said Sir Launcelot, "this shameful cry and noise I may not suffer, for better were death at once than thus to endure this pain."

Then he took the queen in his arms and kissed her, and said,

"Most noble Christian queen, I beseech you as ye have been ever my most special good lady, and I at all times your true poor knight, and as I never failed you in right nor in wrong since the first day King Arthur made me a knight, that ye will pray for my soul if that I here be slain."

Therewith Sir Launcelot wrapped his mantle about his arm and unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open a little so that but one man might come in at once. And so there came striding in a good knight, and with a sword he struck at Sir Launcelot mightily, but he put aside the stroke, and gave the knight such a buffet upon the helmet that he fell groveling dead. And then Sir Launcelot with great might drew that dead knight within the chamber door; and then with the help of the queen and her ladies he was quickly armed in the dead knight's armor. And ever stood Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred crying,

"Traitor knight, come out of the queen's chamber."

"Leave your noise," said Sir Launcelot unto Sir Agravaine, "for know you well, Sir Agravaine, ye shall not prison me this night. For I promise you by my knighthood, if ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall tomorrow appear with you all, before the king, and there I shall answer you as a knight should, that hither I came to the queen for no manner of evil intent, and that will I prove upon you with mine hands."

"Fie on thee, traitor," said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred. "We will have thee and slay thee if we wish, for we have the leave of King Arthur to save thee or to slay thee."

"Ah sirs," said Sir Launcelot, "is there none other way? Then look to yourselves!"

So then Sir Launcelot set all open the chamber door, and mightily and knightly he strode in amongst them, and at the first buffet he slew Sir Agravaine, and twelve of his fellows within a little while after he laid cold to the earth. Also Sir Launcelot wounded Sir Mordred, and he fled with all his might. And then Sir Launcelot returned again unto the queen, and said,

"Madam, now know you well that all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe."

And then each gave the other a ring, and so there he left the queen. But when Sir Mordred was escaped from the noble knight Sir Launcelot, he mounted upon his horse and rode unto King Arthur, sore wounded and smitten, and all bleeding. And there he told the king all how it was, from the beginning to the ending.

"Jesu mercy," said the king, "he is a marvellous knight of prowess. But alas, that ever Sir Launcelot should be against me. Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken forever, for with him will side many a noble knight: and now it is fallen so that I may not with honor let the queen live."

So King Arthur, in his rage, gave orders that the queen must be judged to death, and he commanded her to the fire, there to be burnt. Then spoke Sir Gawaine and said:

"My lord Arthur, I would counsel you not to be over hasty, but that ye would delay this judgment of my lady the queen, for though Sir Launcelot were found in the queen's chamber, yet it might be that he came thither for none evil, for ye know that the queen is more beholden unto Sir Launcelot than unto any other knight, for oft-times he hath saved her life, and done battle for her when all the court refused her."

"Why say ye so?" said the King Arthur. "Ye have no cause to love Sir Launcelot, for this past night he slew your brother Sir Agravaine, a full good knight, and also almost he had slain your other brother Sir Mordred."

"My lord," said Sir Gawaine, "of all this I have knowledge, but insomuch as I gave them warning, and insomuch as they would not abide by my advice, I will not revenge their deaths."

But the noble King Arthur said to Sir Gawaine,

"Dear nephew, I pray you make you ready in your best armor, with your brethren Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to bring my queen to the fire, there to have her judgment and receive the death."

"Nay, my most noble lord," said Sir Gawaine, "that will I never do; for know you well I will never be in that place where so noble a queen as is my lady, Queen Guenever, shall take a shameful end. For know you well," said Sir Gawaine, "my heart will never serve me to see her die."

Then said the king to Sir Gawaine,

"Then allow your brothers Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth to be there."

"My lord," said Sir Gawaine, "know you well they will be loath to be there present, but they are young and unable to say you nay."

Then spake Sir Gaheris and the good knight Sir Gareth unto Sir Arthur,

"Sir, ye may well command us to be there, but know you well it shall be sore against our will. But if we be there by your strict commandment, we will bear no harness of war upon us."

"Then make you ready," said the king, "for she shall have her judgment at once."

"Alas," said Sir Gawaine, "that ever I should live to see this woeful day."

And Sir Gawaine turned and wept heartily, and so he went into his chamber.

Then the queen was led forth, clad only in her smock. And so then a priest was brought to her, that she might be shriven of her misdeeds. Then was there weeping and wailing and wringing of hands of many lords and ladies. But there was one at that place that went unto Sir Launcelot and gave him warning. And right so he spurred his horse and came to the fire, and whosoever stood against him was slain, and there might none withstand Sir Launcelot. But in this rashing and hurling as Sir Launcelot thrang here and there, he happened to slay Gaheris and Sir Gareth, the noble knight, for they were unarmed and unaware; however, in very truth, Sir Launcelot saw them not, and so they were found among the dead in the thickest of the battle.

Then when Sir Launcelot had thus done, he rode straight unto dame Guenever, and had a gown to be cast upon her, and made her to be set behind him, and prayed her to be of good cheer. And so he rode his way with the queen unto his castle, Joyous Gard, and there he kept her as a noble knight should do, and many great lords and some kings sent Sir Launcelot many good knights, and many noble knights drew unto Sir Launcelot.

When it was told unto King Arthur how the queen was taken away from the fire, and when he heard of the death of his noble knights, and especially Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, then the king swooned for pure sorrow. And when he awoke, he said,

"Alas, that ever I bare crown upon my head! For now have I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever Christian king held together. Now within these two days I have lost forty knights, and also the noble fellowship of Sir Launcelot and his kin. Alas, that ever this war began. Now, fair fellows," said the king, "I charge you that no man tell Sir Gawaine of the death of his two brethren, for I am sure," said the king, "when Sir Gawaine heareth tell that Sir Gareth is dead he will go nigh out of his mind. Mercy Jesu," said the king, "why slew he Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris? For I dare say that Sir Gareth loved Sir Launcelot above all men earthly."

"That is truth," said some knights, "but they were slain in the hurtling as Sir Launcelot thrang in the thick of the battle; and as they were unarmed he smote them and knew not whom that he smote, and so unluckily they were slain."

"The death of them" said Arthur, "will cause the greatest mortal war that ever was. And know you well," said the king, "my heart was never so heavy as it is now, and much more am I sorrier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enough, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company. And alas that ever Sir Launcelot and I should be at debate. Ah Agravaine, Agravaine," said the king, "Jesu forgive thy soul; the evil will that thou and thy brother Sir Mordred hadst unto Sir Launcelot hath caused all this sorrow."

And ever among these complaints the king wept and swooned.

Then there came one unto Sir Gawaine, and told him how the queen was led away with Sir Launcelot, and nigh twenty-four knights slain.

"He would not be a man of worship, had he not rescued the queen, and in that," said Sir Gawaine, "he hath done but knightly, and as I would have done myself, if I had stood in like place. But where are my brethren?"

"Truly," said that man, "Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris be slain."

"Jesu defend," said Sir Gawaine, "for all the world I would not that they were slain, and in especial my good brother Sir Gareth."

"Sir," said the man, "he is slain, and that is great pity."

"Who slew him?" said Sir Gawaine.

"Sir," said the man, "Launcelot slew them both."

"That may I not believe," said Sir Gawaine, "that ever he slew my brother Sir Gareth. For I dare say my brother Gareth loved him better than me and all his brethren, and the king both. I may never believe that Sir Launcelot slew my brother."

"Sir," said this man, "it is reported that he slew him."

"Alas," said Sir Gawain, "now is my joy gone." And then he fell down and swooned, and long he lay there as if he had been dead. And then, when he arose from his swoon, he cried out sorrowfully and said, "Alas!"

And then he ran to the king, crying and weeping.

"O King Arthur mine uncle, my good brother Sir Gareth is slain, and so is my brother Sir Gaheris, who were two noble knights."

Then the king wept, and he both. Then said Sir Gawaine,

"My king, my lord, and my uncle, know you well now that I shall make you a promise that from this day I shall never fail Sir Launcelot until the one of us have slain the other. And therefore I require you, my lord and king, to prepare for war, for know you well I will be revenged upon Sir Launcelot. For I promise unto God," said Sir Gawaine, "for the death of my brother Sir Gareth I shall seek Sir Launcelot throughout seven kings' realms, and I shall slay him, or else he shall slay me."

And so King Arthur assembled a great host, and laid a siege all about Joyous Gard. But in no wise would Sir Launcelot ride out, nor go out of his castle; neither would he let any of his good knights to issue out, until fifteen weeks were past.

Then it befell upon a day in harvest time, Sir Launcelot looked over the walls and spake on high unto King Arthur and Sir Gawaine:

"My lords both, know ye well all is in vain that ye do at this siege. For if it list me to come out myself and my good knights, I should full soon make an end of this war."

"Fie upon thee," said the king, "I am thy mortal foe, and ever will be to my death day."

"My most noble lord and king," said Sir Launcelot, "ye may say what ye will, for ye know well that with yourself I will not strive."

"Fie on thee, false recreant knight," said then Sir Gawaine. "What cause hadst thou to slay my good brother Sir Gareth, that loved thee more than all my kin? Alas, thou madest him knight with thine own hands. Why slew thou him that loved thee so well?"

"It helpeth me not for to excuse me," said Sir Launcelot, "but by Jesu, and by the faith that I owe to the high order of knighthood, I should with as good will have slain my nephew Sir Bors of Ganis. Alas, that ever I was so unlucky," said Sir Launcelot, "that I did not see Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris."

"Thou liest, recreant knight," said Sir Gawaine, "thou slewest him to spite me; and therefore I shall make war against thee all the while that I may live."

"That me repenteth," said Sir Launcelot.

And then Sir Gawaine made many men to cry out unto Sir Launcelot; and all at once they called him false recreant knight. Then when Sir Bors, Sir Ector, and Sir Lionel heard this outcry, they went unto Sir Launcelot and said thus:

"My lord Sir Launcelot, know you well we have great scorn of the great rebukes that we heard Gawaine say to you; wherefore we pray you, keep us no longer within these walls; for know you well plainly, we will ride into the field and do battle with them."

"Alas," said Sir Launcelot, "for to ride out of this castle and do battle with them, I am full loath."

Then Sir Launcelot spake on high unto King Arthur and Sir Gawaine:

"My lords, I beseech you, since that I am compelled to ride into the field, that neither you, my lord King Arthur, nor you, Sir Gawaine, come into the field."

Then said Sir Gawaine,

"It is my quarrel to fight with thee, Sir Launcelot, because of the death of my brother Sir Gareth."

"Then must I needs do battle," said Sir Launcelot.

And then either party made them ready for to do battle. And on the morn King Arthur was ready on the field with three great hosts. And then Sir Launcelot's fellowship came out at three gates. And always Sir Launcelot charged all his knights to save King Arthur and Sir Gawaine.

And ever King Arthur was nigh about Sir Launcelot to have slain him, and Sir Launcelot would not strike back. And once Sir Bors encountered with King Arthur, and with a spear Sir Bors smote him down; and so he alit and drew his sword, and said to Sir Launcelot,

"Shall I make an end of this war?"

"Not so bold," said Sir Launcelot; "I will never see that most noble king, that made me knight, either slain or shamed."

And therewithal Sir Launcelot alit off his horse, and took up the king and horsed him again, and said thus,

"My lord Arthur, for God's love cease this strife, for ye gain here no honor; my lord, remember what I have done in many places, and now I am evil rewarded."

Then when King Arthur was on horseback, he looked upon Sir Launcelot, and then the tears burst out of his eyes, as he thought of the great courtesy that was in Sir Launcelot, more than was in any other man. And therewith the king rode his way, and said,

"Alas, that ever this war began!"

And then both parties withdrew to rest, and buried the dead and put on the wounded men soft salves.

Then in the morn the battle joined again, and there was much slaughter on both sides. And Sir Launcelot fought harder than he did before, because his nephew Sir Bors was sore wounded. And by evensong time, Sir Launcelot and his party stood better, and their horses went in blood past the fetlocks, there was so much people slain. And then for pity

Sir Launcelot withheld his knights and suffered King Arthur's party to withdraw.

And news of this war went through all Christendom, and at the last it came before the Pope; and he considered the great goodness of King Arthur and of Sir Launcelot, wherefore he charged King Arthur that he take his queen unto him again, and make peace with Sir Launcelot. And when the king understood this, he knew not what to do; gladly he would have made peace with Sir Launcelot, but Sir Gawaine would not let him; but as for taking back his queen, thereto he agreed.

And Sir Launcelot took a hundred knights, and all were clothed in green velvet, and their horses trapped to their heels; and every knight held a branch of olive in his hand, in tokening of peace. And the queen had four and twenty gentlewomen following her; and Sir Launcelot had twelve coursers following him, and on every courser sat a young gentleman, and they all were arrayed in green velvet with sashes of gold, and the horses were trapped in the same way down to the heels, with many ornaments set with jewels and pearls in gold, to the number of a thousand. And the queen and Sir Launcelot were clothed in cloth of gold.

And therewith Sir Launcelot brought the queen to the king, and then he kneeled down, and the queen also. But the king sat still, and said no word. Then Sir Launcelot arose, and thus he spake full knightly:

"My most redcuoted king, ye shall understand, by the Pope's commandment and yours, I have brought to you my lady the queen, as right requireth."

"Well, well, Sir Launcelot," said the king, "I have given thee no cause to do to me as thou hast done, for I have honored thee and thine more than any of all my knights."

"My good lord," said Sir Launcelot, "so ye be not displeased, ye shall understand I and mine have done you oft better service than any other knights have done; and I have myself rescued you from many dangers. And ever I was glad to please you, and my lord Sir Gawaine."

"The king may do as he will," said Sir Gawaine, "but know thou well, Sir Launcelot, thou and I shall never be accorded while we live, for thou hast slain three of my brethren."

Then Sir Launcelot sighed, and therewith the tears fell on his cheeks, and then he said thus:

"Alas, most noble Christian realm, whom I have loved above all other realms, and now I shall depart in this wise. Truly me repenteth that ever I came in this realm, that should be thus shamefully banished, undeserved and causeless. But as to you, Sir Gawaine, if that ye come upon my lands, I pray you charge me not with treason nor felony, for if ye do I must answer you."

"Do thou thy best," said Sir Gawaine. "Therefore hie thee fast that thou were gone, and know thou well that we shall soon come after and break the strongest castle that thou hast upon thy head."

Then said Sir Launcelot unto Guenever,

"Madam, now I must depart from you and this noble fellowship forever. And since it is so, I beseech you to pray for me and say me well." And therewithal Sir Launcelot kissed the queen and brought her to the king. And then he took his leave and departed; and there was neither king, duke, nor earl, baron nor knight, lady nor gentlewoman, but all they wept as people out of their mind, except Sir Gawaine. And so Sir Launcelot took his way unto Joyous Gard. And then ever after he called it the Dolorous Gard.

And thus departed Sir Launcelot from the court forever, and he gathered his host and they sailed unto Benwick, which some men call Bayonne.

And before long King Arthur and Sir Gawaine made a great host ready to pass over the sea, and King Arthur made Sir Mordred chief ruler of all England in his absence, and also he put Queen Guenever under Sir Mordred's care, because Sir Mordred was King Arthur's son. And so King Arthur passed over the sea and landed upon Sir Launcelot's lands, and there he burnt and wasted, through the vengeance of Sir Gawaine.

When this word came to Sir Launcelot, that King Arthur and Sir Gawaine were landed upon his lands, and made great destruction and waste, he said unto his knights,

"My fair lords, know that I am full loath to ride out with my knights for the shedding of Christian blood; and yet my lands are already full bare, from the mighty wars that King Claudas made upon this land, upon my father King Ban, and on mine uncle King Bors; however, I shall send a messenger unto my lord Arthur, to ask a treaty, for peace is always better than war."

So Sir Launcelot sent forth a damsel, and a dwarf with her, requiring King Arthur to leave his warring upon his lands, and so she started upon a palfrey, and the dwarf ran by her side. And when she came to the pavilion of King Arthur, there met her a gentle knight Sir Lucan, and he said,

"Fair damsel, come ye from Sir Launcelot of the Lake?"

"Yea, sir," she said, "I come hither to speak with my lord the king."

"Alas," said Sir Lucan, "my lord Arthur would love Launcelot, but Sir Gawaine will not let him."

And so with this, Lucan led the damsel unto the king, where he sat with Sir Gawaine to hear what she would say. So when she had told her tale, the water ran out of the king's eyes, and all the lords were full glad to advise the king to make peace with Sir Launcelot, except Sir Gawaine, and he said,

"My lord, mine uncle, what will ye do? Will ye now turn back, now ye are come thus far upon this journey? All the world will scorn you."

"Nay," said Arthur, "ye know Sir Gawaine, that I will do as ye will advise me; and yet it seems it were not good to refuse Sir Launcelot's fair offers. But since I am come so far upon this journey, I would that ye give the damsel her answer, for I may not speak to her for sorrow."

Then Sir Gawaine said to the damsel thus:

"Damsel, say ye to Sir Launcelot that this is waste labor; now it is too late. And say that I, Sir Gawaine, so send him word that I promise him, by the faith I owe unto God and to knighthood, that I shall never leave him till he have slain me, or I him."

So the damsel wept and departed, and so she came to Sir Launcelot, where he was among all his knights; and when Sir Launcelot had heard this answer, then the tears ran down his cheeks. Then his noble knights strode about him, and said,

"Sir Launcelot, be of good cheer; think what ye are, and what men we are, and let us match them in the field."

But Sir Launcelot said,

"I was never so loath to do battle as now, and I will always flee that noble king that made me knight."

And in the morn, as Sir Launcelot's knights looked out, they saw the city of Benwick besieged round about. And the siege endured half a year.

Then it befell upon a day that Sir Gawaine came forth, well armed upon a bold steed, and he came before the chief gate with his spear in his hand, crying,

"Where art thou now, thou false traitor, Sir Launcelot? Why hidest thou thyself within holes and walls like a coward?"

All this heard Sir Launcelot, and his knights said to him at once,

"Sir Launcelot, now must ye defend you like a knight, or else be shamed forever. It is time for you to stir, for ye have slept over-long and allowed over-much."

"I am right sad of Sir Gawaine's words," said Sir Launcelot, "for now he has charged me with a great charge. And therefore I must defend me, or be recreant."

Then Sir Launcelot bade saddle his strongest horse and bring his arms. Then Sir Launcelot armed himself quickly and mounted upon his horse, and both knights took great spears in their hands. Then Sir Gawaine and Sir Launcelot departed a great way apart, and then they came together with all their horses' might, and either smote the other in the midst of the shield so strongly that both horses fell to the earth. Then they leaped off their horses and put their shields before them. Then they stood together and gave many grievous strokes, so that the blood burst out in many places on their bodies. Then Sir Launcelot doubled his strokes and gave Sir Gawaine such a buffet on the helmet that he fell down on his side, and Sir Launcelot withdrew from him.

"Why withdrawest thou?" said Sir Gawaine. "Now turn again, false traitor knight, and slay me; for if thou leave me thus, when I am well I will do battle with thee again."

"Know thou well, Sir Gawaine," said Sir Launcelot, "I will never smite a felled knight." And so Sir Launcelot went into the city. And Sir Gawaine was borne into King Arthur's pavilion, and his wounds were treated.

Then there came tidings unto Arthur from England, that made King Arthur and all his host to return. For while Sir Mordred was ruler of all England, he had letters made, as though they came from beyond the sea, that said that King Arthur was slain in battle with Sir Launcelot. Wherefore Sir Mordred called the lords together, and made them to choose him king, and so was he crowned at Canterbury. Then he took the queen Guenever, and said plainly that he would wed her, though she was his uncle's wife, and his father's wife. And so he made ready for the feast, and a day was fixed that they should be wedded; wherefore Queen Guenever was right sorrowful. But she dared not reveal her feelings, but spoke fair, and agreed to Sir Mordred's will.

Then she begged of Sir Mordred to go to London, to buy all manner of things needful for the wedding. And because of her fair speech Sir Mordred trusted her well enough, and gave her leave to go. And so when she came to London, she entered the tower of London, and furnished it with all manner of food and well armed men, and so kept it. Then when Sir Mordred understood how he was tricked, he was exceeding wroth. And he went and laid a mighty siege about the tower of London, and made many great assaults thereat, and shot great guns. But all to no avail, for Queen Guenever would never, for fair speech nor for foul, trust to come into his hands again.

Then Sir Mordred sought Queen Guenever by letters, and by fair means and foul means, to come out of the tower of London, but she answered him shortly that she had rather slay herself than to be married with him.

Then came word to Sir Mordred that King Arthur had raised the siege from Sir Launcelot, and he was coming homeward with a great host, to be avenged upon Sir Mordred. Wherefore Sir Mordred sent messages to all the barons of the land, and many people drew to him. For then it was the common opinion among them, that with Arthur was nothing but war and strife, and with Sir Mordred was great joy and bliss. Thus was much evil said of King Arthur, and many there were that he had raised up from nought and had given them lands, that would not say of him a good word.

And so Sir Mordred drew with a great host to Dover, for there he heard say that King Arthur would arrive, and so he thought to beat his own father from his lands. And the most part of all England held with Sir Mordred. Then came King Arthur with a great navy of ships, and there was Sir Mordred ready and waiting to stop his own father from landing upon the land that he was king over. Then there was launching of great boats and small, and full of noble men of arms, and there was much slaughter of gentle knights. But King Arthur was so courageous, that there might no manner of knights stop him from landing, and his knights fiercely followed him. And so they landed, in spite of Sir Mordred and all his power, and put Sir Mordred back, so that he fled and all his people. So when this battle was done, King Arthur buried his people that were dead, and then was the noble knight Sir Gawaine found in a great boat lying more than half dead. When King Arthur knew that Sir Gawaine was laid so low, he went unto him, and there the king made sorrow out of measure, and took Sir Gawaine in his arms, and said,

"Alas, Sir Gawaine, my sister's son, here now thou liest, the man in the world that I loved most, and now is my joy gone: in Sir Launcelot and you I most had my joy, and now have I lost you both."

"Mine uncle King Arthur," said Sir Gawaine, "Know that my death day is come, and all is through mine own hastiness and willfulness; for I am smitten upon the old wound which Sir Launcelot gave me, and I feel well I must die. Had Sir Launcelot been with you as he was, this unhappy war had never begun, and of all this am I the cause; for Sir Launcelot and his kin, through their prowess, held off all your enemies. But alas, I would not make peace with him, and therefore I pray you, fair uncle, that I may have paper, pen, and ink, that I may write to Sir Launcelot with mine own hands."

And when the paper and ink was brought, then he wrote thus:

> Unto Sir Launcelot, flower of all noble knights that ever I heard of, or saw, in my days: I, Sir Gawaine, King Lot's son of Orkney, sister's son unto the noble King Arthur, send thee greetings, and let thee have knowledge that the tenth day of May I am come to my death-day. Sir Launcelot, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, make no delay, but come over the sea in all haste, that thou mayest with thy noble knights rescue that noble king that made thee knight, that is my lord Arthur, for he is beset with a false traitor, that is my half brother Sir Mordred, and he hath had himself crowned king, and would have wedded my lady Queen Guenever, had she not put herself in the tower of London.

And then Sir Gawaine prayed the king to send for Sir Launcelot, and to cherish him above all other knights. And so at the hour of noon, Sir Gawaine yielded up the spirit.

Then much people drew unto King Arthur, and they said that Sir Mordred warred upon King Arthur with wrong; but they that loved Sir Launcelot drew unto Sir Mordred. And then King Arthur drew him with his host down by the sea side, and there was a day agreed upon between King Arthur and Sir Mordred when they should meet, whereof King Arthur was right glad, that he might be avenged upon Sir Mordred.

So upon Trinity Sunday at night King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, that there came Sir Gawaine unto him. And when King Arthur saw him, then he said,

"Welcome, my sister's son, I thought thou hadst been dead, and now I see thee alive."

"Sir," said Sir Gawaine, "I come hither unto you to warn you of your death; for if ye fight tomorrow with Sir Mordred, as ye both have agreed, doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most part of your people on both sides. Therefore in no wise do battle tomorrow, but make a treaty for a month. For within a month shall come Sir Launcelot, with all his noble knights, and rescue you honorably, and slay Sir Mordred and all that hold with him."

Then Sir Gawaine vanished. And at once the king called his knights unto him, and when they were come, the king told them his vision, that Sir Gawaine had warned him that if he fought on the morn he should be slain. Then the king commanded Sir Lucan, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and two bishops, to make a treaty for a month with Sir Mordred;--

"And offer him lands and goods, as much as ye think best."

So they departed, and came to Sir Mordred, where he had a grim host of a hundred thousand men. And there they spoke with Sir Mordred a long time, and at the last Sir Mordred agreed to have Cornwall and Kent, in King Arthur's days, and all England after the days of King Arthur. Then were they agreed that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and each of them should bring fourteen persons. And they came with this word unto King Arthur. Then said he,

"I am glad that this is done."

But he warned all his host,

"If ye see any sword drawn, come on fiercely, and slay that traitor Sir Mordred, for trust him not."

And likewise Sir Mordred warned his host:

"If ye see any sword drawn, come on fiercely, and slay all that standeth before you, I will not trust in this treaty, for I know well my father will be avenged upon me."

And so they met as their appointment was, and they were agreed thoroughly: and wine was fetched, and they drank. Right so came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on the foot. And when the knight felt this, he looked down and saw the adder, and then he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of no other harm. And when the host of both sides saw that sword drawn, then they blew trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts rushed together. And King Arthur took his horse, and said,

"Alas, this unhappy day."

And never was there seen a more grievous battle in any Christian land. For there was but rushing and riding, thrusting and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken, one to another, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle, and did full nobly as a noble king should. And Sir Mordred that day put himself in great peril. And thus they fought all the long day, till it was near night, and by that time was there a hundred thousand laid dead upon the ground. Then was Arthur wroth out of measure, when he saw his people so slain. Then the king looked about him, and then was he aware that of all his good knights, there were no more left alive but two knights, that was Sir Lucan, and his brother Sir Bedivere; and they were full sore wounded.

"Alas," said the kind, "that ever I should see this sorrowful day. But would to God I knew where that traitor Sir Mordred were, that hath caused all this mischief."

Then was King Arthur aware of where Sir Mordred leaned upon his sword among a great heap of dead men.

"Now give me my spear," said Arthur unto Sir Lucan, "for yonder I have espied the traitor that hath wrought all this woe."

"Sir, let him be," said Sir Lucan; "remember your dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawaine told you; God in his great goodness hath preserved you till now, and if ye leave off now, this wicked day of destiny is past."

"Now I see him yonder alone," said the king, "he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better advantage shall I never have him."

Then the king siezed his spear in both his hands, and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying,

"Traitor, now is thy death day come!"

And when Sir Mordred heard King Arthur, he ran toward him with his sword drawn. And then King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield right through the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound, he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the grip of King Arthur's spear. And he smote his father Arthur with his sword held in both his hands, on the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain pan, and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth. And the noble Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth. And Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere heaved him up, and weakly they led him betwixt them both to a little chapel not far from the sea side. Then King Arthur said,

"Ah, Sir Launcelot, this day have I sore missed thee. Alas, that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawaine warned me in my dream."

Then Sir Lucan fell in a swoon, from lifting the king, and therewith the noble knight's heart burst. Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother.

"Leave this mourning and weeping," said the king, "for it is of no avail; if I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore; but my time fast runneth out. Therefore, take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there, I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come and tell me what thou there seest."

"My lord," said Bedivere, "your commandment shall be done, and I will quickly bring you word again."

So Sir Bedivere departed, and on the way he beheld that noble sword, that the hilt was all of precious stones; and then he said to himself,

"If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come any good, but only harm and loss."

And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And as soon as he might, he came unto the king, and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.

"What sawest thou there?" said the king.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waves and winds."

"That is untruly said," said the king; "therefore go thou quickly again, and do my command."

Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then he thought it sin and shame to throw away that noble sword; and so again he hid the sword, and returned and told the king that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

"What saw thou there?" said the king.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but the waters and the waves."

"Ah traitor untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have thought that thou, that hast been so dear to me and art a noble knight, would betray me for the riches of the sword. But now go again quickly, for thy long delaying putteth me in great peril of my life, for I have taken cold. And unless thou do now as I bid thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands."

Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and quickly he took it up and went to the water side, and there he threw it as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and a hand above the water, and met it, and caught it, and shook it thrice, and then vanished away in the water. So Sir Bedivere came to the king and told him what he saw.

"Alas," said the king, "help me hence, for I fear I have tarried too long."

Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were there, up to the bank came a little barge, with many fair ladies in it, and among them was a queen, and they all had black hoods, and they all wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

"Now put me into the barge," said the king.

And so he did, softly. And there received him three queens with great mourning, and so they set him down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head, and then that queen said,

"Ah, dear brother, why have ye stayed so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught cold."

And so then they rowed from the land; and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried,

"Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me now ye go from me, and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

"Comfort thyself," said the king, "and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust to trust in. I go unto the vale of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul."

And ever the queens and the ladies wept and shrieked, so that it was a pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took to the forest and went all that night, and in the morning he came to a chapel and a hermitage, and thither he went. And when he came into the chapel, he saw a hermit kneeling, and near by was a tomb, newly engraved.

"Sir," said Sir Bedivere, "what man is buried there, that ye pray so hard for?"

"Fair son," said the hermit, "I know not, in truth; but this night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies, and brought hither a dead corpse, and prayed me to bury him."

"Alas," said Sir Bedivere, "it is my lord King Arthur that here lieth buried in this chapel!"

Then Sir Bedivere prayed the hermit that he might abide with him,

"For from here will I never go, but will stay here all the days of my life to pray for my lord Arthur."

And when Queen Guenever understood that King Arthur was slain, she stole away, and five ladies with her, and so she went to Almesbury, and there she made herself a nun. And likewise Sir Launcelot, when he heard the sad tidings, went unto a hermitage and there spent the rest of his days.

Thus there is no more known of the death of Arthur, but that he was led away in a ship wherein were three queens, that were King Arthur's sister Queen Morgan le Fay, the queen of North Wales, and the queen of the Waste Lands; also there was Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, that had done much for King Arthur. Also there was a corpse buried by a hermit, but the hermit knew not for certain that it was truly the body of King Arthur.

Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but that he shall come again, for many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse:

HERE LIETH ARTHUR:
KING THAT WAS AND KING THAT SHALL BE.

Then Sir Constantine, that was Sir Cador's son of Cornwall, was chosen king of England; and he was a full noble knight, and honorably he ruled the realm.

Thus endeth this noble and joyous book of King Arthur, and of his noble knights of the Round Table, that when they were whole together there was ever a hundred and forty. And here is the end of the death of Arthur. This book treateth of the birth, life, and acts of the said King Arthur, of his noble knights of the Round Table, their marvellous quests and adventures, the achieving of the Holy Grail, and in the end the dolorous death and departing out of this world of them all.

To the Student

On the pages that follow are two versions of Chapters 24, 25, and 26 of Book VIII from *Le Morte D'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory.

The first uses the original spellings and punctuation of the first edition, published by the great English printer William Caxton in 1485. You will notice many differences in comparison with present day English, including some different forms for certain letters.

The second version of the same chapters keeps the original language, but the spelling, punctuation, and type-face have been modernized. You can use this version to help you decipher the first one.

The passage tells first of an important incident in one of the most famous love stories of all time, that of Sir Tristram, the greatest of all King Arthur's Knights except Sir Launcelot, and La Beale Isoud (or La Belle Isolde -- that is, the Beautiful Isolde, pronounced ĭ sōld'). This incident, the fateful drinking of a magic love-potion, is followed by a typical adventure of the kind that King Arthur's Knights always seemed to encounter.

A Passage from
LE MORTE D'ARTHUR
by
SIR THOMAS MALORY
in the Original Language
of the
First Edition (1485)

¶ Capitulum xxiiij

THenne vpon a daye kynge Anguyſſhe aſked ſyr Triſtram why he aſked not his bone / For what ſomeuer he had promyſed hym / he ſhold haue hit withoute ſayle Syre ſayd ſire Tryſtram now is hit tyme this is alle that I wylle deſyre that ye wylle gyue me la beale Iſoud youre doughter not for my ſelf but for myn vnkel kynge Marke that ſhalle haue her to wyf / for ſoo haue I promyſed hym / Allas ſaid the kynge I had leuer than alle the land that I haue / ye wold wedde her youre ſelf / Syre and I dyd than I were ſhamed for euer in this world / and fals of my promyſe /

Therfore ſaid ſire Tryſtram I praye you hold your promyſe that ye promyſed me / for this is my deſyre that ye wylle gyue me la Beale Iſoud to goo with me in to Cornewaile for to be wedded to kynge Marke myn vnkel / ¶ As for that ſayd kynge Anguyſſhe ye ſhalle haue her with you to doo with her what it pleaſe you / that is for to ſaye yf that ye lyſt to wedde her your ſelf that is me leueſt / And yf ye wille gyue her vnto kynge Marke youre vnkel that is in youre choyſe /

¶ Soo to make ſhort concluſion la beale Iſoud was made redy to goo with ſyre Tryſtram and dame Bragwayne wente with her for her chyef gentylwoman with many other / thenne the quene Iſouds moder gaf to her and dame Bragwayne her doughters gentilwoman and vnto Gouernaile a drynke and charged them that what day kynge Marke ſhold wedde that ſame daye they ſhold gyue hym that drynke / ſoo that kynge Marke ſhold drynke to la beale Iſoud / and thenne ſaid the Quene I vndertake eyther ſhalle loue other the dayes of their lyf / Soo this drynke was yeuen vnto dame Bragwayne and vnto Gouernaile / And thenne anone ſyre Tryſtram tooke the ſee / and la Beale Iſoud / and whan they were in theire caban hit happed ſoo that they were thurſty / and they ſawe a lytyl flacked of gold ſtande by them / and hit ſemed by the coloure and the taſte that it was noble wyn /

Thenne ſire Tryſtram toke the flacket in his hand / and ſayd Madame Iſoud here is the beſt drynke that euer ye drank that dame Bragwayne youre mayden and Gouernayle my ſeruaunt haue kepte for them ſelf / Thenne they lough and made good chere and eyther dranke to other frely / and they thoughte neuer drynke that euer they dranke to other was ſoo ſwete nor ſoo good / But by that theyr drynke was in their bodyes / they loued eyther other ſo wel that neuer theyr loue departed for wele neyther for wo / And thus it happed the loue fyrſte betwixe ſire Triſtram and la beale Iſoud / the whiche loue neuer departed the dayes of their lyf / ſoo thenne they ſayled tyl by fortune they came nyghe a caſtel that hyght Pluere And there by arryued for to repoſe them wenyng to them to haue hadde good herborouȝ / but anon as ſir Tryſtram was within the caſtel / they were taken pryſoners / for the cuſtomme of the caſtel was ſuche who that rode by that caſtel and brought ony lady he muſt nedes fyghte with the lord that hyghte Breunor And yf it were ſoo that Breunor wanne the feld / thenne ſhold the knyght ſtraunger and his lady be putte to dethe what that euer they were / and yf hit were ſo that the ſtraunge knyghte wanne the feld of ſir Breunor / thenne ſhold he dye and his lady bothe / this cuſtome was vſed many wynters / for hit was called the caſtel pluere that is to ſaye the wepynge caſtel

¶ Capitulum xxv

THus as ſire Tryſtram and la beale Iſoud were in pryſon / hit happed a knyght and a lady came vnto them / where they were to chere them / I haue merueille ſaid Triſtram vnto the knyȝt and the lady what is the cauſe the lord of this Caſtel holdeth vs in pryſon / hit was neuer the cuſtome of no place of worſhip that euer I came in / whan a knyghte and a lady aſked herborugh / and they to receyue hem / & after to deſtroye them that ben his geſtes / Syr ſaid the knyȝt this is the old cuſtome of this caſtel that whan a knyght cometh here / he muſt nedes fyghte with our lord / and he that is weyker muſte leſe his hede / And whan that is done yf his lady that he bryngeth / be fouler than our lordes wyf / ſhe muſt leſe her heede / And yf ſhe be fayrer preued than is oure lady / thenne ſhal the lady of this caſtel leſe her heede / Soo god me help ſaid ſire Triſtram this is a fowle cuſtome and a ſhameful / But one auaũtage haue I ſaid ſir Tryſtram I haue a lady is fayre ynouȝ fayrer ſawe I neuer in alle my lyfe dayes / And I doubte not for lack of beaute ſhe ſhalle not leſe her heed / and rather than I ſhold leſe my heede I wille fyghte for hit on a fayre felde / ¶ Wherfore Syre knyght I pray you telle your lord that I wille be redy as to morne with my lady and my ſelfe to doo batail yf hit be ſo I maye haue my hors and myne armour / Syre ſaid that knyght I vndertake that youre deſyre ſhalle be ſpedde ryght wel /

And thenne he ſayd take youre reſt and loke that ye be vp by tymes and make you redy and your lady / for ye ſhall wante no thynge that you behoueth / and ther with he departed and on the morne by tymes that ſame knyghte came to ſire Tryſtram and fetched hym oute and his lady & brouȝte hym hors and armour that was his owne / and badde hym make hym redy to the feld / for alle the eſtates and comyns of that lordſhip were there redy to behold that bataille and Iugement /

❡ Thenne came ſyre Breunor the lord of that Caſtel wyth his lady in his hand muffeld / and aſked ſyre Tryſtram where was his lady / for and thy lady be fayrer than myn wyth thy ſwerd ſmyte of my ladyes hede / and yf my lady be fayrer than myn / with my ſwerd I muſte ſtryke of her heed / And yf I maye wynne the / yet ſhalle thy lady be myne / and thou ſhalt leſe thy hede / ❡ Syre ſaid Tryſtram this is a fowle cuſtome and horryble / and rather than my lady ſhold leſe her heed / yet had I leuer leſe my hede /

❡ Nay nay ſaid ſire Breunor the ladyes ſhalle be fyrſt ſhewed to gyder / and the one ſhalle haue her Iugement / Nay I wille not ſoo ſaid ſire Triſtram / For here is none that wille gyue ryghteuous Iugement / But I doubte not ſaid ſir Triſtram my lady is fayrer than thyne / And that wille I preue and make good with my hand / And who ſomeuer he be that wille ſaye the contrary I wille preue hit on his hede

And there with ſire Triſtram ſhewed la beale Iſoud / and torned her thryes aboute with his naked ſwerd in his hand And whanne ſyre Breunor ſawe that he dyd the ſame wyſe torne his lady / But whanne ſyre Breunor beheld la beale Iſoud / hym thoughte he ſawe neuer a fayrer lady / and thenne he dradde his ladyes hede ſhold be of / and ſoo al the peple that were there preſent gaf Iugement that la beale Iſoud was the fayrer lady and the better made / how now ſaid ſir Triſtrā me ſemeth it were pyte that my lady ſhold loſe her heed / but by cauſe thou and ſhe of long tyme haue vſed this wycked cuſtome / and by you bothe haue many good knyghtes and ladyes ben deſtroyed / for that cauſe it were no loſſe to deſtroye you bothe / Soo god me help ſaid ſir Breunor for to ſaye the ſothe / thy lady is fayrer than myn / and that me ſore repenteth And ſoo I here the peple pryuely ſaye / for alle wymmen I ſawe none ſoo fayre / and therfor and thou wilt ſlee my lady I doute not but I ſhal ſlee the and haue thy lady / ¶ Thou ſhalt wynne her ſaid ſir Tryſtram as dere as euer knyȝt wan lady / And by cauſe of thyn owne Iugement as thou woldeſt haue done to my lady yf that ſhe had ben fouler / and by cauſe of the evyl cuſtome gyue me thy lady ſaid Tryſtram / & there with alle ſir Triſtram ſtrode vnto hym and toke his lady from hym / and with an auke ſtroke he ſmote of her hede clene / wel knyght ſaid ſir Breunor now haſt thou done me a deſpyte /

¶ Capitulum xxvj

NOw take thyn hors ſythen I am lady les I wil wyn thy lady and I may / thenne they took their horſes / & came to gyders as hit had ben the thonder / and ſire Tryſtram ſmote ſir Breunor clene from his hors / and lyȝtely he roſe vp And as ſir Tryſtram came ageyne by hym / he threſt his hors thorou oute both the ſholders that his hors hurled here and there / and felle dede to the ground / And euer ſir Breunor ranne after to haue ſlayne ſire Triſtram / but ſire Triſtram was lyght and nymel and voyded his hors lightely / And or euer ſir Tryſtram myght dreſſe his ſheld and his ſwerd / the other gaf hym thre or foure ſadde ſtrokes ¶ Thenne they raſſhed to gyders like two bores tracyng and trauercyng myȝtely and wyſely as two noble knyghtes / For this ſire Breunor was a proued knyghte and hadde ben or than the dethe of many good knyghtes / that it was pyte that he had ſo long endured / Thus they fouȝt hurlyng here & there nyȝ two houres & eyder were wounded ſore / thenne at the laſt ſir Breunor raſſhed vpon ſir Tryſtram and tooke hym in his armes / for he truſted moche to his ſtrengthe / Thenne was ſir Tryſtram called the ſtrengeſt and the hyeſt knyght of the world / For he was called byggar than ſir laũcelot / but ſir Launcelot was better brethed / Soo anone ſire Tryſtram thruſt ſyr Breunor doune grouelynge / and thenne he vnlaced his helme / and ſtrake of his hede / And thenne al they that longed to the caſtel cam to hym and dyd hym homage and feaute prayenge hym / that he wold abyde there ſtylle a litel whyle to fordo that foule cuſtom Syr Tryſtram graunted ther to / the meane whyle one of the knyghtes of the caſtel rode vnto ſire Galahad the haut prynce the whiche was ſir Breunors ſone / whiche was a noble knyȝt and told hym what myſauenture his fader hadde and his moder

CHAPTER XXIV

How Sir Tristram Demanded La Beale Isoud for King Mark, And How Sir Tristram and Isoud Drank the Love Drink

Then upon a day King Anguish asked Sir Tristram why he asked not his boon, for whatsomever he had promised him he should have it without fail. Sir, said Sir Tristram, now is it time; this is all that I will desire, that ye will give me La Beale Isoud, your daughter, not for myself, but for mine uncle, King Mark, that shall have her to wife, for so have I promised him. Alas, said the king, I had liefer than all the land that I have ye would wed her yourself. Sir, an I did then I were shamed for ever in this world, and false of my promise. Therefore, said Sir Tristram, I pray you hold your promise that ye promised me; for this is my desire, that ye will give me La Beale Isoud to go with me into Cornwall for to be wedded to King Mark, mine uncle. As for that, said King Anguish, ye shall have her with you to do with her what it please you; that is for to say if that ye list to wed her yourself, that is me liefest, and if ye will give her unto King Mark, your uncle, that is in your choice. So to make short conclusion, La Beale Isoud was made ready to go with Sir Tristram, and Dame Bragwaine went with her for her chief gentlewoman, with many other. Then the queen, Isoud's mother, gave to her and Dame Bragwaine, her daughter's gentlewoman, and unto Gouvernail, a drink, and charged them that what day King Mark should wed, that same day they should give him that drink, so that King Mark should drink to La Beal Isoud, and then, said the queen, I undertake either shall love other the days of their life. So this drink was given unto Dame Bragwaine, and unto Gouvernail. And then anon Sir Tristram took the sea, and La Beale Isoud; and when they were in their cabin, it happed so that they were thirsty, and they saw a little flacket of gold stand by them, and it seemed by the colour and the taste that it was noble wine. Then Sir Tristram took the flacket in his hand, and said, Madam Isoud, here is the best drink that ever ye drank, that Dame Bragwaine, your maiden, and Gouvernail, my servant, have kept for themself. Then they laughed and made good cheer, and either drank to other freely, and they thought never drink that ever they drank to other was so sweet nor so good. But by that their drink was in their bodies, they loved either other so well that never their love departed for weal neither for woe. And thus it happed the love first betwixt Sir Tristram and La Beale Isoud, the which love never departed the days of their life. So then they sailed till by fortune they came nigh a castle that hight Pluere, and thereby arrived for to repose them, weening to them to have had good harbourage. But anon as Sir Tristram was within the castle was such, who that rode by that castle and brought any lady, he must needs fight with the lord, that hight Breunor. And if it were so that Breunor won the field, then should the knight stranger and his lady be put to death, what that ever they were; and if it were so that the strange knight won the field of Sir Breunor, then should he die and his lady both. This custom was used many winters, for it was called the Castle Pluere, that is to say the Weeping Castle.

CHAPTER XXV

How Sir Tristram and Isoud Were in Prison, and How He Fought For Her Beauty, and Smote Off Another Lady's Head

Thus as Sir Tristram and La Beale Isoud were in prison, it happed a knight and a lady came unto them where they were, to cheer them. I have marvel, said Tristram unto the knight and the lady, what is the cause the lord of this castle holdeth us in prison: it was never the custom of no place of worship that ever I came in, when a knight and a lady asked harbour, and they to receive them, and after to destroy them that be his guests. Sir, said the knight, this is the old custom of this castle, that when a knight cometh here he must needs fight with our lord, and he that is the weaker must lose his head. And when that is done, if his lady that he bringeth be fouler than our lord's wife, she must lose her head: and if she be fairer proved than is our lady, then shall the lady of this castle lose her head. So God me help, said Sir Tristram, this is a foul custom and a shameful. But one advantage have I, said Sir Tristram, I have a lady is fair enough, fairer saw I never in all my life days, and I doubt not for lack of beauty she shall not lose her head; and rather than I should lose my head I will fight for it on a fair field. Wherefore, sir Knight, I pray you tell your lord that I will be ready as tomorn with my lady, and myself to do battle, if it be so I may have my horse and mine armour. Sir, said that knight, I undertake that your desire shall be sped right well. And then he said: Take your rest, and look that ye be up by times and make you ready and your lady, for ye shall want no thing that you behoveth. And therewith he departed, and on the morn betimes that same knight came to Sir Tristram, and fetched him out and his lady, and brought him horse and armour that was his own, and bade him make him ready to the field, for all the estates and commons of that lordship were there ready to behold that battle and judgment. Then came Sir Breunor, the lord of that castle, with his lady in his hand, muffled, and asked Sir Tristram where was his lady: For an thy lady be fairer than mine, with thy sword smite off my lady's head; and if my lady be fairer than thine, with my sword I must strike off her head. And if I may win thee, yet shall thy lady be mine, and thou shalt lose thy head. Sir, said Tristram, this is a foul custom and horrible; and rather than my lady should lose her head, yet had I lever lose my head. Nay, nay, said Sir Breunor, the ladies shall be first showed together, and the one shall have her judgment. Nay, I will not so, said Sir Tristram, for here is none that will give righteous judgment. But I doubt not, said Sir Tristram, my lady is fairer than thine, and that will I prove and make good with my hand. And whoseomever he be that will say the contrary I will prove it on his head. And therewith Sir Tristram showed La Beale Isoud, and turned her thrice about with his naked sword in his hand. And when Sir Breunor saw that, he did the same wise turn his lady. But when Sir Breunor beheld La Beale Isoud, him thought he saw never a fairer lady, and then he dread his lady's head should be off. And so all the people that were there present gave judgment that La Beale Isoud was the fairer lady and the better made. How now, said Sir Tristram, meseemeth it were pity that my lady should lose her head, but because thou and she of long time have used this wicked custom, and by you both have many good knights and ladies been destroyed, for that cause it were no loss to destroy you both. So God me help, said Sir Breunor, for to say the sooth, thy lady is fairer than mine, and that me sore repenteth. And so I hear the people privily say, for of all women I saw none so fair; and therefore, an thou wilt slay my lady, I doubt not but I shall slay thee and have thy lady. Thou shalt win her, said Sir Tristram, as dear as ever knight won lady. And by cause of thine own judgment, as thou wouldst have done to my lady if that she had been fouler, and because of the evil custom, give me thy lady, said Sir Tristram. And therwithal Sir Tristram strode unto him and took his lady from him, and with an awk stroke he smote off her head clene. Well, knight, said Sir Breunor, now hast thou done me a despite.

CHAPTER XXVI

How Sir Tristram Fought With Sir Breunor, And at The Last Smote Off His Head

Now take thine horse: sythen I am ladyless I will win thy lady an I may. Then they took their horses and came together as it had been the thunder; and Sir Tristram smote Sir Breunor clean from his horse, and lightly he rose up; and as Sir Tristram came again by him he thrust his horse throughout both the shoulders, that his horse hurled here and there and fell dead to the ground. And ever Sir Breunor ran after to have slain Sir Tristram, but Sir Tristram was light and nimble, and voided his horse lightly. And or ever Sir Tristram might dress his shield and his sword the other gave him three or four sad strokes. Then they rushed together like two boars, tracing and traversing mightily and wisely as two noble knights. For this Sir Breunor was a proved knight, and had been or then the death of many good knights, that it was pity that he had so long endured. Thus they fought, hurling here and there nigh two hours, and either were wounded sore. Then at the last Sir Breunor rushed upon Sir Tristram and took him in his arms, for he trusted much in his strength. Then was Sir Tristram called the strongest and the highest knight of the world; for he was called bigger than Sir Launcelot, but Sir Launcelot was better breathed. So anon Sir Tristram thrust Sir Breunor down grovelling, and then he unlaced his helm and struck off his head. And then all they that longed to the catle came to him, and did him homage and fealty, praying him that he would abide there still a little while to fordo that foul custom. Sir Tristram granted thereto. The meanwhile one of the knights of the castle rode unto Sir Galahad, the haut prince, the which was Sir Breunor's son, which was a noble knight, and told him what misadventure his father had and his mother.